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THE

WRITINGS

OF THE LATE

JOHN M. MASON, D.D.

CONSISTING OF

SERMONS, ESSAYS, AND MISCELLANIES,

INCLUDING ESSAYS ALREADY PUBLISHED IN THE "CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE."

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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PSALM XXIII.

1 *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
2 *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*
3 *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*
4 *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*
5 *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*
6 *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

The pastoral life, which is one of the most ancient and simple forms of society, and has fur-

nished the groundwork of this psalm, was prevalent and honorable among the eastern nations. Flocks and herds were their chief possessions, and the character of a shepherd not beneath the dignity of their patriarchs and princes. An occupation so innocent and useful, so familiar with their habits, and so friendly to reflection, had a natural influence upon their thoughts and language. It supplied the poet with beautiful images, the moralist with insinuating lessons, and the scripture itself with materials for sacred allegory. Of the last, there cannot be a more apposite example than the psalm which we are now to consider. Under the easy and elegant figure of a shepherd's care over his flock, it represents the love of God toward his chosen. He is their shepherd, and they are *the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. The Lord*, saith the psalmist, in verse 1, *the* LORD *is my shepherd.*

There is no difficulty in ascertaining the person here intended; for the description agrees to no other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is at once JEHOVAH and the SHEPHERD *promised to the fathers.* He has ever delighted in this character, which, from the beginning, has supported the faith of his church, and animated her worship. The testimony which Jacob, with his dying breath, left to the Shepherd of Israel, she

has perpetuated and improved. *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock. Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage which dwell solitarily in the wood.* With these petitions concurs the promise, *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.* It was also predicted, that in discharging his engagement, he should become a sacrifice for the benefit and in the room of his flock. *Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered, and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.* He owned the relation, and confirmed the oracle, when he *laid down his life for the sheep.* The name and office descended with him into the grave; and that same *resurrection from the dead,* which declared him to be *the Son of God with power,* declared him also to be the *great Shepherd of the sheep.* We know him, at this hour, *as the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls;* and recognize our fellowship with his servant David, breathing the same sentiment in the same words, *the* LORD *is my shepherd.*

Here is obviously a claim of personal interest in the Lord Jesus. For the faith of his people is

not a cold assent to abstract propositions. *The substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen*, it appropriates to itself a common good, and applies general promises to particular use. We shall reap little advantage from *the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*, if he be not to us individually, whatever he is to his people at large. *My* shepherd, my *own* shepherd, are words of life as well as of assurance. And when I can utter them believingly, my bosom swells with joy, and all my soul is on my lips. It is thus that the psalmist, mingling with the Redeemer's flock, takes refuge in his protection, exults in his favor, and reposes upon his truth. The choice was wise and happy: for as it terminated upon the Creator and not upon the creature, it incurred no danger of disappointment. *My shepherd*, saith David, is JEHOVAH. Ancient believers were better instructed than to be ignorant of Messiah's divinity. Their good "confession" was not dishonored by the dream of a created Savior, nor the atheism of a secondary God. They did not perceive the impossibility, so plain to modern refiners, of conciliating essential godhead with covenant-office. On the contrary, they saw, as all true believers now see, that without the former, there could be no place for the latter. He who is not divine, cannot be their shepherd. The force of their reasoning,

their consolation, their life, depend upon this principle, "My shepherd is JEHOVAH." Hence the psalmist infers, *I shall not want.* The argument is short, but firm. It is the argument of a man who knows his God. Less than the *all-sufficient* can neither fill our capacities, nor accomplish our desire. We should soon exhaust the highest angels, and find them to be, like every other creature, when embraced as our portion, a *broken cistern*, and a *lying vanity. The portion of Jacob is not like them.* His attribute is infinity. The father and fountain of all being and blessedness, when he condescends to bind himself to men by covenant relation, and to sanction his promise with his oath, they have obtained the last security for their happiness. As impossible is it for him not to *give that which is good*, as it is *impossible for him to lie.* Not every thing, indeed, which would gratify their wishes, often impatient, and ill-directed, but every thing seasonable and proper, every thing conducive to their benefit, every thing which they themselves would ask, were they perfectly free from error, shall they receive at his hand. *For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.* This David believed, and he reasons accordingly: *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

An illustration of the position contained in this introductory verse, and of its effect upon a gracious mind, occupies the rest of the psalm, and divides it into two corresponding parts—the *first*, (verses 2, 3, 4, and 5,) unfolds the nature of Christ's pastoral office; and the *second*, (verse 6,) is the psalmist's tribute of faith and gratitude.

I. The *pastoral office* of Christ is represented to consist in making *provision* for his flock, in its *direction, and its defense.*

1. The good Shepherd *provides* for his flock. Verse 2. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

A flock of sheep feeding securely in rich pastures and by the cooling stream, is a pleasing spectacle in any country. But under the sultry skies, and amidst the burning sands, of the East, it awakened exquisite emotion, and was a lively emblem of temporal and spiritual felicity. Most significantly does it depict the condition of believers. The world around them is a land of deserts and of drought, which yields nothing to *satisfy the longing soul.* Sooner shall the body be nourished by whirlwinds and the dust, than the spirit with things of mere time and sense. But from this land of deserts and of drought, does the gracious Shepherd lead his flock to *green pastures*, and *gentle waters;* that is, he provides enjoyments for them as suitable to their

nature and circumstances, as the best of pasture and of water are to the literal sheep. Let us, therefore, inquire what these enjoyments are, and where they are to be found.

In general, they are the mercies of the new covenant, established in his hands as in the *hands of a mediator*. He delivers his people, by *faith in his blood*, from the inquietudes of *an evil conscience;* puts them beyond the reach of the curse, for *there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus;* and rescues them from the bondage of sin and Satan. He reveals to them his excellence, admits them into his friendship, *sheds his love abroad in their hearts*, introduces them to his Father as their reconciled God, intercedes for them *within the vail*, supports them by his grace, gives them *an inheritance among them that are sanctified*, and is Himself their all.

Now these are enjoyments adapted to the nature of an immortal soul, and commensurate with its faculties. Here *the meek eat and are satisfied*. The void in the bosom is filled up. They have found the *pearl of great price*, and are enriched forever. Secured in the possession of everlasting good, they may say, *Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee*. Till the pastures of God wither, and the river of life fail, they cannot want: and it is their own fault, if *the peace of God, which*

passeth all understanding, do not keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

These spiritual blessings are dispensed in the church; for she is *the church of the living God*, without whose pale there is no revealed way of salvation. He has committed to her, as a sacred deposit, his word and ordinances, by which sinners are convinced, converted, and made heirs according to *the hope of eternal life.*

The original of all saving truth is in the *person* of Jesus Christ; and the exact transcript of it, in his word. *His word is truth*, and truth is the food of the soul. All its principles, and precepts, and promises, are designed to convey supplies of grace out of the fullness of our Lord Jesus. Even the scandal of the cross, and the sublimer doctrines of religion, are adapted to the taste of the new man, and promote his growth. And as they all have a practical use, not one of them, however odious to carnal wisdom, can be taken from the Bible without depriving believers of a means by which they receive from God out of heaven both the bread of life and the water of life. Hence the testimonies of the psalmist and the prophet: *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.* And hence, too. the

reverence of believers for the holy scripture. It is the language and the voice of their God and Father, *speaking peace to his saints*, which is *better to them than thousands of gold and silver*. His sentence is creation; and when it has gone forth to bless them through the medium of his word, neither earth nor hell shall hinder them from *rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory*.

With the word of God we are to connect his *ordinances*, comprehending the whole system of instituted worship. They bear the *image and superscription* of the Lord *our lawgiver*, and are instruments by which he both maintains his authority, and imparts his grace. To these ends, beside the devotion of the closet and family, the public homage of the church on his own day, the holy sacraments, the ministry of reconciliation, all contribute. In preaching the word, and in the other functions of their calling, the undershepherds obey the commandment of the Chief Shepherd, *Feed my sheep—feed my lambs*. Precious as are the divine truths in themselves and at all times, they are clothed with less majesty, and, ordinarily, accompanied with less power, in the exercises of private religion, than in the service of the sanctuary. For *the Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob*. Next to the Holy Spirit, the ministry of

the word is our Redeemer's principal *ascension-gift;* a standing pledge to the church, and proof to the world, that he is now *in the presence of God for us.* Accordingly he puts a distinguished honor upon this ordinance; for *the preaching of the cross,* which is *to them that perish, foolishness,* is *to them who are saved, the power of God.* This explains the attachment of true Christians to the house of God. Many resort thither from the impulse of habit, of fashion, of curiosity, or, it may be, of less reputable motives; but *they see his power and his glory. There* are the *goings of their God, their King: and there he abundantly blesses Zion's provision, satisfies her poor with bread, and clothes her priests with salvation, so that her saints shout aloud for joy.* "Happy is the people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people whose God is Jehovah."

2. The good Shepherd exercises a vigilant superintendence over the steps of his flock. Verse 3. *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

This branch of his office includes the double grace of recovering his people from their errors, and shaping the course of their renewed obedience.

1st. Recovery from their errors. *He restoreth my soul.*

Sheep are proverbially prone to wander; and the farther they proceed, the more are they bewildered, and the more unlikely to return. Alas! the resemblance is but too exact. To exchange obedience for transgression, that is, to exchange peace for anguish, is superlative folly; but such folly has existed, does exist, and may be ours. Christians, although *renewed in the spirit of their mind*, carry about with them, in the remnant of corruption, a principle of *departure from the living God.* Take away, or suspend the influence of his grace, and the work is done: the most enlightened and tried believer goes astray the next moment. The examples proposed in scripture for our humiliation and warning, are not of obscure and dubious professors, but of men eminent for their faith, and eminently favored of God. How far the regenerated may go, it is not for us to conjecture, and it would be madness to try. That they shall not finally perish, is one of the plainest promises of the Bible. But between the circumspection of grace and the damnation of hell, there is ample room for sinning and for chastisement. To lose your comfort it is not necessary that you lose your soul. Even within the boundaries of pardon, there are a thousand deviations from duty sufficient to mar your peace, and bring you under the rod. No inconsistency can be traced

between the Lord's *forgiving his people*, and his *taking vengeance of their inventions*. How many afflicted have borne witness to these truths! How do our own hearts smite us for our aberrations from the *straight path* of God's commandments! And how sad is the condition of those who, duped by the *deceitfulness of sin*, have *left their first love*, and gone away after vanity! Lost attainment, forfeited joy, withering graces, barrenness, leanness, lameness, and a long train of kindred miseries, follow the steps of disobedience. If the *end* be not *destruction*, it is because *the issues from death belong unto the Lord our God.* The eye of the Shepherd is continually upon the track of his wandering sheep; and in the critical moment when they are ready to be torn or dashed in pieces, he interposes for their help, takes them up in his arms, and carries them back to his pasture and his fold.

The manner in which he conducts this interposition may be concisely stated in the three following particulars:

(1.) He comes upon them, for the most part, by surprise. In a course of backsliding, and often in the very acts of provocation, when nothing is farther from their thoughts than his presence and reproof, he speaks to their consciences. "What dost thou here?" with a voice which recalls the memory of a thousand mer-

cies, and awakens them from their slumbers. Their eyes open, and the dream is at an end. The seducing vision has fled, and the realities around them are realities of guilt and horror. They stand before him abashed and petrified, unable either to escape or to apologize.

(2.) He communes with them about the nature and aggravation of their sin. His former kindnesses come into remembrance, and are contrasted with their ungenerous requital. His forgotten love, his injured sacrifice, his grieved Spirit; their own experience, and profession, and vows, rise up, and present each a separate accusation. Ah! who can tell the amazement which then seizes them? the bitterness of their self-reproach? the depth of their self-abhorrence? *O my God*, is their contrite moan, *O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God.* Hapless prodigal! *Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God when he led thee by the way?* Sin with impunity we cannot. Our remorse and compunction belong to the discipline of our Father's house: for he hath said, that *if his children forsake his law, and walk not in his judgments; if they break his statutes, and keep not his commandments; then will he visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes: Nevertheless, his loving-kindness will he*

not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. These chastenings, therefore, of the Lord, though painful, are in mercy, that we may not *be condemned with the world.* Their degree and continuance are regulated by his wisdom; but whenever they have accomplished their purpose, when they have vindicated the purity of the gospel, have turned the sweets of iniquity into wormwood and gall, have shed new charms over the *beauty of holiness*, the way is prepared for binding up the broken heart; and, then,

(3.) The good Shepherd *restores peace to his mourners.* For he leads them, by faith, to a renewed application of his blood for pardon: and he pardons most freely. *I am pacified*, saith he, *I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done.* This, O this melts the heart. Such patience! such compassion! such forgiveness! All the springs of contrition are opened at once; *Rivers of waters run down their eyes;* they throw away with disgust the idols which they had laid in their bosom, and *turning their feet unto the divine testimonies*, say, *Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.* They now regain the *fellowship of their Savior's death*, and *crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts.* Their languid graces revive; *precious faith*, and all the other powers of the new man resume the sway; and their *smell is as the smell of a field which the*

Lord hath blessed. I will heal, saith he, *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from them. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon.* The blessed influence extends through them to their fellow-believers and their fellow-men: *they that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.* Jesus had, from the beginning, *prayed for them, that their faith should not fail;* and now that *they are converted*, they are qualified, by the varieties of Christian experience, to *strengthen their brethren.*

Thus he restoreth their souls; and when restored, does *not turn away from them to do them good.* For,

2d. He conducts them in the course of their future obedience. *He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

Here we must satisfy an inquiry embracing the *nature* of that course which the restored of the Lord pursue—his *interference* to preserve them in it—and the *reason* of his interference.

(1.) The nature of their course is indicated by the phrase, *paths of righteousness.*

Right, righteous, righteousness, are terms borrowed from sensible objects, and express the combined ideas of a *rule* perfectly exact, and of *correspondence* with the rule. Whatever coincides with it is *straight*, or *right;* whatever does not coincide with it, is *crooked.* Transferred to moral subjects, this figurative language marks the distinction between good and bad, whether in doctrine or practice. Accordingly we consider the law of God as the *rule* or *standard* to which every principle and action must be referred. All its precepts are *righteous;* conformity with them is *righteousness;* and, consequently, *paths of righteousness* signify that habitual and actual holiness which they prescribe both for the heart and life. But, then, we must remember that the divine law as regulating *Christian* obedience, is, in a very peculiar sense, the law of Christ. For, as the representative of his people, he has, on the one hand, divested it of its covenant-form by fulfilling its injunctions in the righteousness of his life, and extinguishing its penalty in the sacrifice of his death, so that it neither justifies nor condemns them. And on the other, he has given them, as the test and measure of their sanctification, this very law, to keep which they are both required by his authority, and constrained by his love. Thus connected, its precepts ascertain and promote

evangelical purity, and are transcendently *paths of righteousness.*

In the *first* place: like a path literally straight, they lie directly before us, and cannot be missed without perversion of the will. *The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein;* and though *a scorner seek wisdom and find it not,* yet *knowledge is easy to him that understandeth.*

Unlike the circuitous paths of sin, they contain no deception. When the sinner takes one step he cannot see the next. Gayety dances around him; Flattery whispers in his ear; Promise enumerates joys at hand: and thus, by little and little, he is seduced into a labyrinth where he is bewildered and lost. The smiling scenery is blasted: Promise has proved a liar; Flattery fills her tongue with imprecation; and Gayety is transformed into a fiend at the threshold of hell! Not so the paths of righteousness: Light from above shines on them, and our view reaches even to their termination. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the* END *of that man is peace.*

Secondly. As a straight or right line is the shortest distance between two points, so the obedience of faith is the shortest road to comfort. *They who turn aside after their crooked ways,* only weary themselves with vanity; till at length, their days consumed, and their mercies gone,

God leads them forth with the workers of iniquity. But *wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* Here is no painful retrospect. Lost time, and wasted powers, shall never reproach the service of God. They belong to the folly of sinners, and the wages of sin; while every act of holy obedience brings present satisfaction, and gains upon ultimate hope. This, my brother, is no illusion: no empty boast to cover a damning conscience and a tortured heart. It is the sobriety of bliss, sealed in the experience of millions besides the psalmist. *Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.* Gladness, which grows large with use, and more exquisite with age. *Adding to their faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity;* believers are *neither barren nor unfruitful* now, and at last shall have *an entrance ministered unto them abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

(2.) They owe their *preservation* in these paths of righteousness to the interference of their Redeemer. *He leadeth me,* saith David. He leadeth us, say all who, like David, have

known his restoring grace. The metaphor is taken from the custom of the eastern shepherd, who did not *drive*, but *lead* his flock; going before them, and calling them after him. Applied to our Lord Jesus and his redeemed, it instructs us in many precious truths: for instance—That all our practical holiness lies in imitating him, *who hath left us an example that we should follow his steps.*—That the most self-denying duties should be attempted with cheerfulness, as they have been sanctified by the experience, and are softened by the sympathy, of our Elder Brother, *Though he were a* SON, *yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.* He has not left a thorn in our path which did not pierce his own blessed foot: not one, of which his blood will not counteract the poison, and heal the wound —That in all the opposition which his people have to encounter, he is the first to perceive the foe, and to sustain the onset; for *their King shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them*—that he *enlarges their hearts to run the way of his commandments:* his love *constraining* them, both as a motive and a principle, to *live not unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again;* a constraint which liberates their will, so that they *walk at liberty*, and without which they would infallibly revert back into bondage. Summarily, they know nothing,

perform nothing, and are nothing, but in their LEADER'S might. He is the *Lord their strength*, who *guides them with his counsel*, as a pledge that he will *afterward receive them to glory.*

(3.) The *reason* of this, his interference to keep his people in the paths of righteousness, is assigned in the last clause of the third verse—It is *for his name's sake.*

The *name* of Jesus includes all the excellencies of his person, offices, and work. To display them in the redemption of sinners, and to acquire the glory which had been promised to its accomplishment, was the end of his incarnation, his sorrows, and his death. *For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame; and because he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; therefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.* Whatever grace, love, truth, wisdom, power, belongs to the Lord Jesus as the *Captain of salvation*, it is comprehended in that *name* for the sake of which he leads believers in the paths of righteousness. Its lustre shines forth in his regard for them.

As the *first-born among many brethren*, of whom he is not ashamed; and for whom he *is entered as the forerunner within the vail.*

As *the high priest of their profession*, through whose blood they *have boldness to enter into the holiest;* and who, being their *advocate with the Father, ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

As the author and pattern of their perfection; drawing more and more strongly the lines of their resemblance to himself; evincing his omnipotence in the transformation of their minds; and exhibiting to holy angels and spiritual men, the rudiments of that beauty which is to receive its finish *when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*

The praise thus derived to his name bears directly upon the consolation of his people in two important points.

First, it shows the safety of their state.

By leading them in the paths of righteousness, he connects their preservation with his own glory. And the question, whether they may fall into complete and final apostasy? is answered by another, whether the Son of God shall tarnish the honor of his own name? In virtue of his covenant-engagement, he must either keep them, or deny himself: and, therefore, not one of them, no, not the feeblest of them all, *can* perish without the ruin of his glory. The alternative is awful, but sure; and while it stands on the heavenly record, let no heart faint, nor any joints be loosed. Here is the refuge of

the church of God; here the assurance of her children's peace.

Secondly. The name of Jesus, for the sake of which he leads his people in the paths of righteousness, furnishes them with argument before the throne of grace. "Me," may the tempted and disconsolate say, "me he might overlook and contemn, but will he contemn or overlook his own name?" No, thou afflicted: the charge of indifference toward his name, or those who trust in it, shall never be attached to God thy Savior. To repose such confidence in his name as couples it with thine eternal salvation, is that boldness of the gospel which never went ashamed from the mercy-seat. This was well understood by the *elders who obtained a good report through faith.* Let us plead in their spirit and language, *For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.* If we die when suing for the mercy of the covenant, or be deserted while our eyes are toward thee for guidance in the paths of righteousness, the seekers of thy face will be discouraged: thine enemies will triumph, *and what wilt thou do to thy great name?* We are, indeed, most criminal and vile: *but there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.* Our appeal is to the proffers and promises of thy word. *Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake;*

Do not disgrace the throne of thy glory; remember, break not thy covenant with us."

But the shepherd's care does not end with the direction of his flock: he *supports* and *defends* it also, both under the pressure of calamity, and in the enjoyment of privilege. The proof of this point is in verses four and five, which describe the

3d. Part of his office. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

The psalmist shows the support and protection which believers may expect from their Redeemer, in the most grievous calamity. For, having put an extreme case in relation to himself, he declares his security, and then assigns the reason of it.

The *case*, which is extreme, he puts in these words: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.*

That we may rightly understand the whole passage, we must fix the meaning of the expression, *valley of the shadow of death.* It does not signify *dying:* for it is not the valley of *death*, but of the *shadow* of death; and the shadow of an object cannot be the same thing with the ob-

ject itself. The psalmist speaks of *walking* through this valley: which is a scriptural term for a habit of action, or a course of suffering. But death is neither the one nor the other; it is a *single* event. Accordingly the scriptures use the similitude we are now considering in a quite different sense. Two or three examples will suffice: Psalm xliv. 19. *Thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the* SHADOW OF DEATH. Psalm cvii. 10—14. *Such as sit in darkness, and in the* SHADOW OF DEATH, *being bound in* AFFLICTION AND IRON; *because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the Most High: therefore he brought down their heart with labor; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their* TROUBLE, *and he saved them out of their* DISTRESSES. *He brought them out of darkness and the* SHADOW OF DEATH, *and brake their bands in sunder.* Jer. ii. 6, 7. *The Lord—led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of the* SHADOW OF DEATH, *through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt; and I brought you into a plentiful country,* &c. As a shadow bears to the mind an obscure image of the appearance and proportions of its object, together with the idea of its being present or near; and as darkness is gloomy, and death

dreadful, the *valley of the shadow of death*, is a scene of great and uncommon distress—of such trials as overpower the soul; throw it into amazement; break its purposes; fill it with alarm and horror like that which invades trembling nature at the approach of the "king of terrors." This condition may arise from one or both of the following causes.

(1.) Temporal calamity. Acute and lingering disease; strokes upon family, or fortune, or fame; the rod of oppression; the rage of persecution, when men of blood hunt for the precious life; have taught thousands of whom the world was not worthy, what is meant by walking in the valley of the shadow of death.

(2.) A similar effect may be produced by spiritual conflict, whether it be with the *plague of the heart*, or with *the accuser of the brethren*. The apostle Paul had experience of the former, when *the law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members*, forced from him that "exceeding great and bitter cry," *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death;* and of the latter, where *there was given to him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him:* with respect to both, most, if not all believers, are sooner or later, his *companions in tribulation.*

They often go in the bitterness of their souls through the power of *sin that dwelleth in them*, and often are summoned to the field in *the whole armor of God.* The name of our foes is *Legion; for they are many.* In what manner they act upon our spirits, it were idle to conjecture; but their existence and operations being matter of clear revelation and sober experience, it were still more idle to dispute. *The fiery darts of the wicked*, are well known to those who *fight the good fight of faith.* And when he is permitted to assail them by ministering fuel to their corruptions; by obscuring their graces; by distracting their minds with blasphemous suggestions; the most resolute among them are liable to faint, and are sometimes driven to such extremities, that their *souls choose strangling and death, rather than life.*

From the necessity of thus walking through the valley of the shadow of death, God has not promised an exemption to any of his "dear children;" and they ought not to *think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try them, as though some strange thing happened to them.* For they are called *to deny themselves, to take up their cross, and follow their Lord;* and are warned from the beginning, that they *must through much tribulation enter into his kingdom.* The doctrine is as old as that of redemption, and is exem-

plified in the history of all the redeemed. In the verse before us, David considers it a very probable case, that he might himself shortly *walk through the valley of the shadow of death.* With his eye fastened on the prospect, he stands firm and collected, in the persuasion that he shall come off without ultimate loss. *I will fear no evil.* Not to fear evils against which we are unprotected, savors more of stupidity than of courage. But there is often safety without security: for as there may be great danger where there is no apprehension, so there may be much apprehension where there is no danger. This frequently happens even to the "Israel of God," who, judging by delusive rules and *according to the outward appearance,* are *afraid where no fear is.* But the psalmist, who at this time saw his objects in a true light, and measured them by a correct standard, was as free from dread as from danger. "The good man," saith he, "can have no cause to shrink back from tribulation. Horrible as is that valley of the shadow of death which lies across my path, I will not turn aside to avoid it. Deaf to the report of inward feeling and outward circumstance, I will hold on my way, and *fear no evil.*" But was the psalmist a mad man? Had he learned to contemn the counsels of reason, and to stifle the emotions of nature? Did he court wo in the work of use-

less mortification? Or had religious discipline soured him to life, and wrought him up to the frenzy, that the agonies of body and mind are beneath a wise man's care? None of all these. He resolves his confidence into a principle which humbles the pride of the world, and is unapproached by the maxims of philosophy; and that is, the presence and guardianship of his Redeemer. I will fear no evil, *for* THOU *art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* Behold the source of Christian magnanimity! Behold the charm which controls the mischief, and lightens the gloom of the shadow of death! *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,* is one of the "gracious words which have proceeded out of his mouth," and which shall not fail, though earth and heaven be sacrificed to its accomplishment. "THOU art with me! My trials pass under thine eye, are apportioned by thy wisdom, and softened by thy love. Thy hand ministers help in the season of need; and it is *thine* to cause *all things to work together for* my *good.*

The *rod and staff,* by which the shepherd assisted his flock and kept off the beasts of prey, are emblems of those means which indicate the presence of Jesus; comfort his people, and awe their enemies; especially his word, his providence, and his Spirit, all which conspire in their preservation and support. Encouraged by such

company, and backed by such aid, the language of David is both natural and modest; while it expresses a pre-eminence which believers will ever have over carnal men. In a world of sin we must look for sorrow; but without the faith of Jesus we shall look in vain for consolation. Peace of conscience and the repose of the heart; the light of God's countenance and an imperishable hope, belong not to the wicked, even in their best estate. And when they are to enter the valley of the shadow of death, their idols broken and their glories gone, who, ah who would step into their place? But out of that dreary vale there issues a voice: *I will fear no evil, for* THOU *art with me.* The voice is Christian, and Christ is there! His gracious presence compensates the keenest suffering. Who has not heard of the wonders which it has wrought? It calmed the spirit of Daniel in the den of lions: it called forth the song of Paul and Silas from the dungeons of Philippi: it has borne ten thousand of the faithful above persecution and the persecutor: and at this hour, after the lapse of ages, it instructs ten thousand more to *glory in tribulation;* so that *they may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.* Encircled thus with mercy, and *walking by faith,* they *endure as seeing him who is invisible.* Patience has *her perfect work,* and they *go in the*

strength of the Lord God, waiting till their deliverance come, and the *shadow of death be turned into the morning*.

This happy reverse, which repays sharp affliction with sweet enjoyment, is not uncommon in the life of faith. The psalmist has noticed it in verse 5, where he introduces his Redeemer under the new emblem of a most hospitable friend.

Verse 5. *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over.*

These words, in very simple and impressive figure, celebrate,

(1.) The *bounty* of the Lord Jesus. *Thou preparest a table before me.*

The allusion is to that hospitality of the East, which entertained even strangers, with the fattest of the flock, with wine and oil, and the most precious fruits of the earth. And these kind offices were the more grateful, as travelers had often no other accommodation than what was furnished by private munificence. But to invited guests, and on festive occasions, the preparations, according to rank and condition, were most liberal and sumptuous. Now believers are *strangers and pilgrims* who pass through this world, a land of wilderness and drought, in search of *a better country, that is, a heavenly*. Exposed to fatigue, alarm, and conflict, they

would faint without the refreshments provided for them by their Lord and Master. There are intervals in which he *deals bountifully with them.* Taking them by the hand, he leads them from the valley of the shadow of death into his *banqueting house, and his banner over them is love.* Instead of that awful reserve which they might anticipate in the "King of glory," he treats them with the most gracious familiarity. *Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.* Here, their spirits are recruited, and their toils forgotten. They *delight themselves in the abundance of peace;* and have the best of all proof that it is not *vain to serve God.* Thus does he bestow upon his church collectively, and upon her members individually, periods of prosperity and joy. When the one is favored with "quietness and assurance," in the possession of his truth and ordinances; and the other flourish under the "light of his countenance," he has *prepared a table before them.*

(2.) The *circumstances* which attend this privilege, enhance its own value, and the glory of its author. Thou hast prepared a table before me, saith the text, *in the presence of mine enemies.*

Like David, every believer is compassed with those who seek his life. And when to him, as to David, the Lord has *given rest round about from all his enemies,* they are made the reluctant

witnesses of his comfort. It greatly heightens our mercies to know, not only that they are from the hand of our Redeemer, but that he maintains us in the possession of them, against both earth and hell. This truth, which we are never to forget, should be asserted with more than ordinary zeal, when *many deceivers are entered into the world.* We hear much of the philosophical character of the day: "that the ages of intolerant bigotry are succeeded by an age of liberal forbearance; that the rights of conscience are too well understood and established to be in danger hereafter; and therefore, that the reign of persecution is over." But let no Christian be thrown off his guard by these *good words and fair speeches, which deceive the hearts of the simple.* That we may, at present, worship our God without molestation of person or property, is true: and it is an inestimable privilege. But let us refer it to the right cause, and not array a philosophy "falsely so called," in the honors which are due to our Redeemer alone. Enmity against his cross and followers, as implacable and active as ever, is limited by that sovereign control which makes *the wrath of man to praise him, and restrains the remainder of wrath.* Let that control be taken off, and the next hour thousands will arise to *mingle your blood with your sacrifices.*" No! we ascribe no-

thing, for we owe nothing, to the mitigated spirit of the world. But we owe every thing, and therefore ascribe every thing, to the grace of our Lord Jesus. We thank HIM, and not the liberality of the times, that our gospel-table is spread, and we surround it "without fear." The foe stands by and burns with rage, that he must look on, but may not disturb. Under his eye, and within his reach, we safely break our bread and pour out our wine. Blessed Jesus! We adore thee for thy protection! Thou alone *hast prepared a table before us in the presence of our enemies!*

(3.) This bounty of our Lord is likewise accompanied with marks of *singular condescension. Thou anointest my head with oil.*

Here, again, we must recur to a custom prevalent in the East—the custom of anointing the head with scented oil. In those hot climates, this was a most agreeable service, refreshing the guest, and perfuming the apartment; while it was performed, if not by the hands of the "good man of the house," at least by his direction. Anointing the head with oil, is, therefore, an emblem of happiness arising from the kindest offices of friendship. Scriptural usage applies it to the Holy Spirit, who is, emphatically, *the oil of gladness*, wherewith the Savior himself was *anointed*, and with which he anoints the

heads of his people. In other words, the Holy Spirit, who rested without measure upon the Lord Jesus, and by this *measureless* communication of all divine gifts and graces, constituted him the CHRIST, the ANOINTED, rests likewise upon all the members of his mystical body; communicating to them out of his fullness, a suitable *measure* of gifts and grace. For they *have an unction from the Holy One*, on account of which God calls them his ANOINTED, his *Christs*,* and by the efficacy of which they become *Christians*. This David knew and has expressed: this all believers know and experience. The Holy Spirit, as the *Spirit of the Son*, God *sends forth into their hearts, crying Abba, Father*. He, therefore, dwells in them as the *spirit of grace and supplication*, and the immediate efficient of all their spiritual character and joy. *Receiving of that which is Christ's, and showing it unto them*, he mortifies their corruptions, quickens their graces, enlightens their darkness, dispels their fears. His name is COMFORTER; and when he descends upon them in his exhilarating power, solacing them with his love, beautifying

* 1 Chron. xvi. 22. Psalm cv. 15. The word in Hebrew משחי, equivalent to the Greek Χριστος, (Christ) and like it signifying *Anointed*, is applied primarily to the Redeemer, and secondarily to believers, on account of their union with him, and participation of his Spirit.

them with his salvation, and breathing around them his fragrant grace, they have all that is signified by the emblem of the text: their heads are *anointed with fresh oil.*

(4.) To conclude his animated description, *My cup*, saith David, *runneth over.*

Wine distributed *in a cup*, by the master of the house, among his guests, closed a Jewish entertainment: and hence both in scriptural and common language, an *overflowing cup* is the symbol of complete satisfaction; or, as the subject requires, of consummate wo. There can be no dispute about its meaning in the present instance. It proclaims the *blessedness of the man whom God hath chosen and caused to approach unto him.* This, their communion with him in the Lord Jesus; this defense against their enemies; this participation of the Holy Ghost, fills up their souls. *Jehovah is the portion of their cup:* they know it, they rejoice in it, and they ask no more.

Such "marvellous loving-kindness" from the "Hope of Israel," may find, but cannot leave, a hard and unbelieving heart. The psalmist, therefore, follows the enumeration of his mercies with the tribute of his *faith and gratitude*, which is in verse 6, and composes the

II. Part of the psalm.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

1. The tribute of his *faith*. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*

That this is an exercise of faith, and not an expression of mere feeling, is plain from the confidence with which it anticipates *futurity:* thus answering to the apostle's forecited definition. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* Let us, then, consider what this exercise of faith contains, and upon what it is founded.

(1.) It contains a testimony to the propriety of the Lord's dispensations.

The psalmist had visited the "green pastures" and "still waters:" he next surveyed the "valley of the shadow of death," under the impression that he might shortly "walk through it:" he afterwards turns his eye from the "ten thousands that set themselves against him round about," to the "table prepared before him in their presence;" and gives his judgment. "It is all right," saith he. "It is just as it ought to be. I have nothing to diminish, to add, nor to alter. My soul owns it as *goodness and mercy*, throughout."

(2.) It contains an act of implicit trust, that whatever might be his own unworthiness, this

"goodness and mercy" should never be withdrawn. "It *shall follow me*," saith he, "in all my wanderings: it shall tread in my very steps, and not leave me a moment till my warfare be over: it shall follow me *all the days of my life*." This is strong persuasion, but it rests on a strong foundation. Our God and Savior, who *keepeth the covenant and mercy to them that love him*, will neither disown his people nor break his word. Admit the *possibility* of his casting them off; that *his gifts and his calling are* not *without repentance*, and you cut the sinews of their rejoicing. No more must words of confidence be heard from their lips. I will walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and fear no evil! is a vain boast, because I have no assurance that my Lord will be with me. Nor is it any relief to tell me that I shall have his presence, provided I be faithful in my obedience. Without his presence to secure my fidelity, I am put upon the performance of an impossible condition. A very little acquaintance with myself, will teach me that if it in the least depended on my own strength, my claim to the continuance of the Lord's goodness and mercy, though ever so valid the present hour, would be forfeited the next. But this is not, and never can be, the case. My Redeemer is *Jehovah, who changes not*, and therefore, I am neither consumed, nor forsaken. All

this is practical truth, which the psalmist has recorded as his own experience; and which is substantially the experience of other believers. "The Lord," saith he, "who is my Shepherd, actually makes me to lie down in green pastures; he actually restores my soul, and leadeth me in the paths of righteousness; he actually is with me in the valley of the shadow of death, and has prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Here is no room for cold and wavering speculation: for here is nothing but plain fact as the fulfillment of covenant-promise. The psalmist declares what he had seen, and heard, and felt. He had, therefore, in his own bosom, a comment upon his Lord's veracity, and a pledge of future bounty, more solid and satisfying than a thousand arguments, though from the mouth of an angel. He placed his foot upon the rock of eternal truth; and *as he believed, so he spake.* "*Surely!*" exclaims he, "it is not vague opinion, nor fluctuating hope: it is sweet reality, it is blessed certainty. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life!*" O that our souls knew more of the precious exercise! how would it silence our murmurs, and hush our tumults, and swell our joy! Happy psalmist! may I learn, with thee, to weigh all things in the balance of the sanctuary; and to sing, with thee,

of goodness and mercy which *have* followed, and *shall* follow me, all the days of my life!

2. As none who have ventured their souls upon the Lord's promise, make an evil report of his ways; and as their only return for his benefits is devotion to his fear, the psalmist, who speaks their mind, has added the *tribute of his gratitude* to that of his faith. *I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* The same resolution, with a slight variety of phrase, occurs in Psalm lxi. verse 4. *I will abide in thy tabernacle forever:* and they both express the most unreserved and hearty dedication to the service of God. Particularly,

(1.) A deliberate choice on the part of Christians, of the interests of God's glory, and of God's church, as their own most valuable interests.

Nothing less can be signified by *the house of the Lord*, as the object of their affections. They approach him not with the dry compliment of occasional visitors; but with the dispositions of those who mean to be constantly under his eye, and obedient to his will. They "cast in their lot" with his people; they join themselves unto his family; they live in *his house*, and every thing belonging to it is dear to their hearts.

(2.) Waiting upon God in all the ordinances of instituted worship.

To know him and not to worship him, is a contradiction. To pretend to worship him, and not wait upon him in his ordinances, is to stand self-convicted of slandering his wisdom, and slighting his grace. In Christians, such conduct is impossible. They *love the habitation of his house, and the place where his honor dwelleth:* thither they repair, that they *may behold his beauty and inquire in his temple;* may hear from his own lips, and find in his own appointments, solutions of difficulties which would otherwise dishearten and distract them; may be *satisfied with the goodness of his house,* and with the communion of that *loving-kindness which is better than life.*

(3.) An open confession of his name.

There is nothing in the service of God to create a blush; and a heart renewed by his grace is too honest to play the hypocrite. Worldlings often show a fair face to religion, while their souls overflow with enmity against it, and they secretly plot its ruin. But to pretend affection for the world, while the "hidden man of the heart" cleaves unto God, is repugnant to every principle of the Christian calling. And such a deception would be not less impracticable than absurd. A living Christian can no more refrain from giving indications of his life, than light can refrain from shining in the dark. Carnal men quickly discern and avoid those who *run not*

with them to the same excess of riot, and are seldom backward to *speak evil of them*. So that if we take up our abode in the house of the Lord, it cannot be long a secret to the world; nor do we wish it to be so. We pursue different objects in a different manner: we *come out from among them, and are separate*, as belongeth to *the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty*. And having learned to *esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*, we can have neither reason nor inclination to conceal, that *we had rather be door-keepers in the house of our God for a single day, than to dwell a thousand in the tents of sin.*

(4.) As this devotion to the Lord Jesus is voluntary and open, so it is *irreversible*. I will dwell, saith David, in the house of the Lord *forever;* or as he has interpreted his own words, *all the days of my life.*

Christians make no experiments with their religion; and it is incredible they should. Having *passed from death unto life*, how can they waste a moment in considering which is preferable? Their choice being for eternity, and necessarily including the remainder of their days in time, they *are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.* Consequently, there can be *no place for repentance.* For who would exchange the

favor of God for his displeasure? his blessing for his curse? his kingdom for the bottomless pit? Of those who walk *according to the course of this world*, thousands have expired with curses on their folly. But among all who *have made the Lord their trust*, not one has recalled his choice, nor regretted that he was too early, too closely, or too long attached to the house of God. A believer's condition affords present enjoyment, and a happy presage of his end. "My soul," cries he, "has regained her rest. Here I am satisfied, and here will I remain. *While I live, will I praise the Lord;* and when I am to *finish my course*, I will expect in glory the consummation of what is begun in grace. For both worlds, it is my resolution and my hope, to *dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*"

Out of this review of the psalm, there arises a question deeply interesting to him who speaks, and to them who hear. *What acquaintance have I with its truth, and what share in its consolations?* The latter spring out of the former, and are inseparable from it. To aim at their separation, as many do, is the wicked and vain attempt to "put asunder what God has joined." Be it written on the tables of our hearts, "as with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond," that none who are strangers to the grace of the gospel, have any right to its comforts.

Through any other channel, all pretensions to them are false, for all enjoyment of them is impossible. Take heed, professor of religion, that thou *sport not thyself with thine own deceivings.* It is easy to say Lord, Lord; to yield verbal assent to the doctrine of this psalm concerning the mutual relation of Jesus and his people; to preserve such a "*form* of godliness" as shall obtain credit among thy fellow-mortals; but without something more, and something better, thou shalt not "see God." That religion which shall survive the grave, and go with thee into the eternal world, results from union to Jesus, as the Lord thy Life. It is not enough, that he is the *Shepherd of the sheep;* he must be *thy* shepherd, and thou one of his flock—not enough, that he saves sinners; he must save *thee*, even thee *in particular*, *with an everlasting salvation*—not enough, that he supplies the wants of the saved; he must enable *thee* to live by faith upon him *for thine own soul*, and to receive out of his fullness *grace and mercy to help in the time of need.* Whoever stops short of this, stops short of life. His services are rejected, because his person is under condemnation. Till Christ be *formed in him the hope of glory*, not only is he shut out from the blessings described in this psalm, but all his penitence, devotions, virtues, are of no avail. He wants the original principle of all

genuine virtue, and all acceptable obedience; which is laid in the *renewing of the Holy Ghost.* His hope is the hope of the hypocrite, which *shall perish*, and *the wrath of God* ABIDETH *on him.*

Yet the condition of unregenerated men, though dreadful, is not desperate. Lost they are: but *the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost*, and is now *exalted with the right hand of God to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.* In the days of his flesh he *was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;* but at parting with his apostles, he informed them, *other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.* He has been gathering them, ever since, *out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation:* they have crowded, by thousands, into his fold: they are pressing into it at this hour, *and yet there is room:* there is room, O perishing man, *for thee.* The very circumstance of thy being forlorn and destitute, instead of keeping thee from the Savior, should impel thee to flee to him as thy refuge from the approaching tempest. Art thou criminal and base? *Are thine iniquities increased over thine head, and thy trespass grown up unto the heavens?* This only renders the salvation of Jesus the more indispensable, and his grace in

proffering it, the more alluring. His work is with sinners, the chief of sinners; his delight, to pluck them as *brands out of the burning;* and therefore, O guilty man, his overtures are to *thee.* Exclude not thyself from his kingdom by voluntary unbelief; seeing that he is able, and hath promised, *to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him.*

Christians, who alone have a right to claim, and a taste to relish, the consolations of this psalm, should improve it to "their furtherance and joy of faith." No sweeter song can they sing "in the house of their pilgrimage." Their Redeemer, whom it celebrates, is rich, and mighty, and bountiful, and vigilant, and gracious. They *are complete in him;* they *have all and abound.* Be satisfied then, O believer, with thy portion! Let not an emotion of discontent stir in thy bosom! *Be not envious at the foolish, when thou seest the prosperity of the wicked.* Thou hast a better inheritance, and better company, and all thy concerns shall come to a better issue, than theirs. Repress every hard thought of thy munificent Shepherd. Believe his truth; believe it against the objections of sense, and the calumnies of Satan; believe it without staggering, and thine eyes *shall* see his salvation. Whatever be the judgment of thine own ignorance, and of the world's malice, he is lead-

ing thee by *a right way;* and this thou shalt confess, with wonder and praise, when he shall have brought thee to thy *city of habitation!* Go on, then, in his strength; set up thy banners in his name; and inscribe them with this triumphant motto: *The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.*

LECTURE

ON THE

EIGHTH PSALM.

LECTURE.

PSALM VIII.

1 *O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.*

2 *Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.*

3 *When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;*

4 *What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

5 *For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.*

6 *Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:*

7 *All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;*

8 *The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.*

9 *O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!*

On what occasion this psalm was penned, interpreters are not agreed, nor is it material for us to know. It seems probable, however, that it was composed by David, before God called him from the cottage to the crown, and whilst in the exercise of the pastoral employment, he watched his flocks by the light of the moon. But whether this is really the case or not, it is of high moment that we should rightly understand, and duly improve its important instructions. A little reflection, discovers that the redemption by Christ Jesus is the endearing theme to which our attention is invited. For we shall find, in the course of our discussion, that after proposing in general terms the illustration of God's glory in the victories of the gospel; it informs us, particularly, of the instruments who were to carry on the wondrous plan—ascends to the original

source of the blessing—tells us how it should be purchased for men—and what provision is made for its security and success to the end of the world.

The mind of pious David was deeply affected by this interesting view. How did his heart burn within him, while he mused on the endearing topic! How did his spirit exult, when he saw, with prophetic eye, the honor of his Redeemer spreading to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south! Dazzled with the brightness, and overwhelmed with the immensity, of the prospect, he loses himself, and, as the mouth of those millions who should flock to the Shiloh, exclaims, in the language of admiring gratitude,

I. *O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth; who hast set thy glory above the heavens!*

By the "name" of God, we are to understand in general, any thing which he makes known of himself: and therefore we find that his different attributes are called, in different parts of scripture, his name. Here, and in some other passages, it signifies the divine glory, or the assemblage of the divine perfections as they shine in the dispensation of grace.

That the psalmist is not speaking of the divine perfections as they are displayed in the

works of nature, is manifest; because it is Jehovah whose name he says is *excellent in all the earth*, i. e. in all the habitable parts of the earth, where there are rational beings to know, to feel, to celebrate its excellence. Now, though nature teaches that there is a God, and teaches something too of his character, yet nature teaches neither the name nor the whole character of Israel's God. We are not to suppose that the psalmist means to exclude any part of the divine character from a share in this excellence; and how could Jehovah's character appear excellent, where it was not known? We are also to reflect that when the scriptures mention the knowledge of God's name as a ground of reverence, fear, trust, delight, &c., they always refer to a knowledge derived from revelation. Farther; excellence is a high degree of good, and cannot but attract love. But the apostle Paul declares that *the carnal mind is enmity against God;* and therefore, cannot love him, nor deem his perfections excellent. Now if unrenewed men are unable to love God, even with the help of revelation; they certainly cannot learn to love him, without it, from the works of nature. If they think they can, it is a proof of their ignorance and self-deceit. The God whom they love, is a God of their own making. Nature and philosophy discover nothing of Je-

hovah, but as an absolute God. They may, and if they do him justice they will, represent him as clothed in majesty: but it is the majesty of terror. A flame goeth before him—the whirlwinds play around him—his voice is thunder—his look, the lightning's flash. It is only in Christ Jesus that God reconciles the world to himself—it is in him alone that all the divine perfections appear excellent—and it is in the view of the universal preaching of the gospel, that the psalmist could with any propriety say, *O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!*

To the earth, however, the praise of God's excellent name is not confined, for he *has set his glory above the heavens.* Not *in* the heavens; an expression which might lead us to think of the glory of creation and providence as exhibited in the heavenly bodies: but *above* the heavens, far beyond the reach of mortal observation. That by this phrase is meant the highest heavens, that glorious place which Christ has prepared for his people, and in which, with the angels, they adore redeeming love, will be abundantly clear if we attend to another of a similar kind. In the 113th Psalm, we read thus, *From the rising of the sun, unto the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised. The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory*

ABOVE THE HEAVENS. The parallel passage in Malachi i. 11, *From the rising of the sun, unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles*, makes it plain that the glory mentioned in the psalm just quoted, is the glory of God in the salvation of men; and this is the glory which is there said to be *above the heavens*. And the words which we are considering, present to our view the august and solemn scene formed by the church militant and the church triumphant, joining in one general chorus of praise to the Father of mercies. We may therefore rest satisfied, that the immediate and only object of this verse is to extol the grace of God in sending his Son to redeem sinners. Well may we wonder at the immensity of such love: and our wonder will be increased if we follow the psalmist. He not only bids us admire the salvation itself, but tells us,

II. What instruments should be employed in carrying on the amazing plan, as in

Verse 2. *Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.*

That the words we are now considering are prophetical, we are not allowed to doubt, for so they were viewed by Him who could not mistake the meaning of scripture. We are told,

by the evangelist Matthew (ch. xxi.) that when our Lord, according to an ancient oracle, made his public entry into Jerusalem, the multitude, actuated it would seem by a divine impulse, cried out, *Hosanna to the son of David; blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!*" When he passed to his house of prayer, authoritatively purged it from impious intruders, and performed, in the sight of admiring crowds, some of his most benevolent miracles, the sacred ardor flowed in every breast, and even the children who were sporting in the temple caught the cry, *Hosanna to the son of David!* On this occasion, the blind, envious, unprincipled Pharisees, nettled at one of the most delightful and sublime scenes that can interest a reasonable nature, asked in the spirit of discontented petulance, *Hearest thou what these say?* *Yea*, replied the Savior, quoting the very words of David, *Yea: have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?* This circumstance clearly shows that the passage before us refers to the times of the gospel; and if it received an accomplishment in the fact just related, it was more abundantly accomplished in the ministry of the first preachers of the gospel. These were characterized by the spirit of prophecy as babes. *Whom shall he teach knowledge? and*

whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. (Isaiah, xxviii. 9.) They were termed babes by Christ himself: for when he upbraided with ignorance and hardness of heart *those cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, he answered*, the historian tells us, *and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto* BABES. This passage, with the correspondent one in Luke, makes it manifest that the disciples are intended: for that evangelist informs us, that these words were spoken when *the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.* (Luke x. 17.)

The disciples of Christ, though adult in years, were babes in knowledge and improvement: plain, simple men, unfurnished with that erudition to which the affluent had access. With respect to the great work also, in which they were to be employed, they were as feeble in themselves, and as unfit for it, as babes are for performing the duties of active life. To the world likewise, they appeared contemptible in their birth, in their connections, in their fortune, in every thing about them. And the project of reforming mankind, in their hands, carnal wisdom,

which would think such a task proper for statesmen only and philosophers, would pronounce as silly as the charge of an empire committed to an infant. And yet, *from the mouth of these babes and sucklings*, (let proud philosophy take a lesson from the fact,) *out of the mouth of these babes and sucklings*, God, the psalmist assures us, *ordained strength:* such strength, as shook to its centre the kingdom of darkness, and made Satan fall as lightning from heaven. The great Mediator, during and especially after his own ministry, crowned with abundant success the preaching of his word. The apostles went forth in the name of Jesus; Jehovah's arm was nerved in their cause; and, by the might of that arm, *worm Jacob thrashed the mountains, and beat them small as chaff.* In thus ordaining strength, God *perfected praise:* for the weakness of the instruments, compared with the miraculous effects they produced, showed to all who were not *given up to the lusts of their own hearts*, that *the excellency of the power was of him.*

The strength of which we are speaking, God, the psalmist informs us, ordained *because of his enemies: that he might still the enemy and the avenger.*

"Enemies," in the former part of this clause, seems to comprehend all who were unfriendly to the cause of Christ, whether secretly or openly.

Enemy and *avenger* perhaps refer chiefly to Satan; for these characters unquestionably are his: or if not to him solely, to Satan and the persecutor. If this distinction be not admitted, if the whole clause be considered as a general description of the foes of the Redeemer, the truth which it inculcates will yet remain the same; viz. that these foes were so strong as to yield to nothing less than almighty power; or as the psalmist expresses it, that such power was necessary to enable the disciples *to still the enemy and the avenger.* And did they still him? Yes. Their preaching silenced the heathen oracles—they refuted the arguments—they detected the sophistry—they stopped the mouths of their adversaries. The Jews, we are told, *could not resist the spirit and wisdom by which Stephen spake.* And of the disputes which Paul had with his antagonists, the issue frequently was that they replied with reproach and persecution, the sure tokens of a baffled cause. In the triumphs which the apostles and fellow-laborers gained, they found their Lord faithful to his promise, that *he would give them* a *mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries should not be able to gainsay nor resist.* In fact, nothing else could have supported them: for no sooner was the trumpet of the everlasting gospel blown, than hell, alarmed, mustered its legions: earth joined

the conspiracy: and the resistance, to human ability, must have been invincible. But the sword of the apostles (the word of God, the doctrines of the cross) was of heavenly temper: it shivered the weapons, it mowed down the ranks, of their enemies; and they became *more than conquerors through him that loved them.* If we are duly affected with a sense of the precious favors that flow from the gospel of peace, and of the divine wisdom and energy employed in propagating them among men, we will be prepared for attending the psalmist whilst in the

III. Place, he directs us to the original source of these blessings. This is the good pleasure, the free grace of God, as we are taught in verses 3 and 4.

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

I remark, in passing, that it is from his omitting the sun, while he speaks of the other heavenly bodies, that David is thought to have composed this psalm when he watched his flocks at night.

Difference of sentiment appears in the answers which have been given to the question, who are meant by *man*, and *the son of man?* That these words cannot relate to mankind in their state of innocence, is perfectly clear. The

word here rendered *man*, conveys an idea of frailty and misery; neither of which belonged to our first parents before their fall: besides, there would be neither propriety nor sense in denominating them the *son of man;* for there was then no son of man in existence—and, to add no more, the psalmist is lost in wonder, at God's being mindful of man, and visiting him. But it is no wonder at all, that God should notice, and kindly visit, *innocent* man. Nothing which he saw fit to create, while it continues as he created it, does he judge below his attention. It is moral deformity alone that renders a creature odious and loathsome in the sight of a holy God.

On the other hand, men, valuable for their erudition, and venerable for their piety, have supposed that the words *man*, and *the son of man*, or at least the latter, refer to the Redeemer in his state of humiliation. We know that he is frequently, though not exclusively, styled the *Son of man.* We know likewise that he speaks of himself in terms of the lowest abasement. *I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.* But, with all deference to the respectable authority of those who think that Christ is meant in the verses before us, I hope I shall be pardoned for deviating a little from their opinion. What striking proof did Jehovah give that he was mindful of the person here men-

tioned, and visited him? The psalmist tells us in the very next words, it was by making his Son *a little lower than the angels.* But according to the hypothesis to which I object, Christ was *already* in a state of humiliation; so that God could not express his being mindful of him, and visit him by bringing him into that state. And where was the wonder that God the Father should thus visit the humbled Savior? He was, even in his lowest humiliation, the Son of Jehovah's love. Divine faithfulness was pledged to the suffering Redeemer; and is it any wonder that God should keep his word?

I therefore conclude that the psalmist has his eye upon mankind in their lost, their wretched condition. When I look, says he, at thy heavens —when I contemplate the immensity of thy works—when I consider the boundless theatre on which thy glory is displayed—that thou needest neither us nor our services—that we would hardly be missed were we blotted from the page of existence—particularly when I consider our guilt and vileness, I cannot but exclaim, what is man, insignificant, worthless man! what is he? what has he to attract thy notice? Nothing at all. That thou shouldst be mindful of him, and visit him with thy salvation, is of sovereign grace! Well might the psalmist be astonished! well may we be astonished! and

our astonishment will rise if we accompany him while he tells us, in the

IV. place, how the great salvation was provided for men; it was by the humiliation and exaltation of the Son of God in the character of our Redeemer. This is what the psalmist means when he says, verse 5,

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.

We commonly hear these words interpreted of man as he came originally from the hands of his Creator. But this interpretation proceeds from a negligent view of the subject. No criticism can torture the psalmist's expression into such a meaning, and make it consistent with the rest of the psalm, and the rest of the scripture.

The verse plainly tells us, how the Most High testified that he was mindful of man, and with what honor and favor he visited him. But the very idea of being mindful of him and visiting him, supposes that he was created before, for it is not easy to see how one can visit a nonentity.

Farther, the apostle Paul, in the second chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews, cites this passage to prove the divine glory of the Lord Christ: but if it relates to man, the apostle would argue very strangly, in asserting that Christ was *above* the angels, because man was *below* them.

The phraseology, however, both of the psalmist and of the apostle puts the matter beyond doubt and forbids reply. The word which we translate *made lower*, has not the smallest reference to creation, but signifies in both the original languages, to lessen, to diminish, to bring from a superior to an inferior station: and the word which we render *little*, refers, not to degrees of dignity, but to length of time.

Now, if the glory of Christ suffered a diminution by his being made (as the margin very properly reads) for a little while lower than the angels; the inference is strictly logical, that prior to this event he was above them, and therefore was God. In this view the words are not at all applicable to man: for when was he higher than the angels? In any other, the apostle's quotation is impertinent, and his argument ridiculous.

The only difficulty which can remain, is, that the psalmist should introduce the Redeemer so abruptly, by the relative "*him*," without any previous notice of the person whom he meant. But this difficulty will vanish, if we allow ourselves to reflect that this psalm was composed in the hours of retirement—that it is a devout effusion of gratitude to God. Surely the psalmist knew whom he meant, and as surely God could be at no loss to understand him—nor will this circumstance prejudice the general use of the

psalm, for we must farther reflect not only that the manner in which the sacred penman speaks precludes uncertainty about the person to whom he alludes, but that the faith of ancient believers pointed perpetually to a promised Savior, like the needle to the pole—that they were so frequently engaged in meditating upon his character and offices, as not to be taken by surprise when he was suddenly mentioned without any formal intimation. In truth they knew much more of their Redeemer, and thought much oftener upon him, than we are willing to believe —they knew much more of him, and thought much oftener on him, than many who are inclined to pride themselves on their superior light.

When, therefore, the psalmist says, *thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels*, nothing else can be intended than God's sending his own Son to assume our nature, to sojourn in our earth, and to submit to all that train of afflictions which are comprehended under the term of his *humiliation*. But this scene of suffering was of short duration: for having *finished the work which was given him to do*—having, by his obedience and death, made *reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness;* he rose from the dead, he ascended up into heaven, *he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high;* or as the psalmist expresses it, he was *crowned with glory and honor*.

That Jehovah should be at such vast expense to rescue perishing men from everlasting ruin, is a thought too big for our little souls; but the fact is as certain as the thought is transporting: and to complete our consolation, the inspired psalmist not only assures us of its reality, and tells us how the blessing was procured for men, but informs us,

V. What provision is made that it shall not be lost, but shall be continued and experienced in the world till the end of time.

The provision of which I speak, is the supreme and uncontrolable authority of the Lord Jesus; an authority which he constantly exerts for the benefit of his church, so that *all things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose.*

Of this authority we have a description in the 6th, 7th, and 8th verses. *Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things under his feet. All sheep and oxen; yea, and the beasts of the field: the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.*

No argument is necessary to show that the whole of this passage belongs to the same person; and the beginning of it is expressly applied to Christ by the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 27, and Ephes. i. 22. In the latter, after declaring that

God the Father had exalted Christ *far above all principality and power, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.* He sums up his description of the Redeemer's authority, in the general expression of the psalmist, *and hath put all things under his feet.* The very same application is made, in the epistle to the Hebrews, where the apostle proves from fact, that the psalmist could not mean the dominion which man exercises over the creatures: *for*, says he, *we see not yet all things put under him*: yet, after so long a time, after all his advantages, and improvement, and labor, we see not yet all things put under him: *but we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels—crowned with glory and honor.*

It is perfectly clear that all the works of God, are not now, and never were, and never will be, under our government: but to our Redeemer is *given all power in heaven and earth.* His unlimited rule extends to every the meanest thing that swims in the waters, creeps on the earth, or flies in the air. But by his command, even the beasts of the field shall espouse his quarrel; the veriest reptile shall be to his enemies a messenger of wrath!

After this brief, but comprehensive and delightful view of the dominion of the Messiah, David concludes the psalm as he had begun, by

expressing his reverence, gratitude, and admiration: and all who are governed by the same spirit, will cordially join his note of praise—*O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!*

Let us dwell upon a few of the practical reflections which this psalm suggests.

1. The brightest and most endearing illustration of the divine glory, is in the scheme of redemption.

'Tis true, God has sketched, if I may so speak, the outlines of his character upon his works. They all unite in proclaiming,

"The hand that made us is divine."

But 'tis equally true, that our understandings are darkened, and our wills corrupted; so that of ourselves, we can neither perceive Jehovah's character as we ought, nor love it if we could. The misfortune however is that multitudes, and of those too who are called philosophers, think they can derive from the works of creation all the knowledge of God which they need: and thus we hear them talk of rising from nature up to nature's God; and at the same time they totally disregard as below their notice, his revealed will. But it is an eternal truth that the God of nature is the God of grace: and he who never saw his glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ, never yet saw it aright in the system of nature.

To assert the contrary, would be to assert, that a man who is stark blind at noonday, can see clearly at twilight. Give philosophy every advantage, and she can teach nothing but some abstract general attributes of deity; his goodness, his justice, &c. Whatever matter they may afford for sublime speculation to the reasoning mind, they can impart no peace to the sinner. In vain is it told to him that God is the Father of mercies, and pours down his blessings upon his children. He sees that the blessings of providence fall alike upon the evil and the good; so that notwithstanding these tender mercies, he may perish eternally. Philosophy is mute at questions like these: *Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High God?* How shall justice be exalted, and the sinner sheltered from wrath? She never yet enabled, and never will enable, any one to use the language, *My Lord and my God.* The gospel of Jesus can alone satisfy our doubts, and fill us with joy and peace in believing. Let us never then hear of putting our hope in God out of Jesus Christ. We have nothing to do with an absolute God. Every attribute of his nature thunders into the bosom of guilt ten thousand terrors. It is our Emmanuel alone who hath opened a new and living way to the Father, and in him alone we have boldness and

confidence in approaching the throne of grace. I would not be understood to discredit philosophy: but let her keep her proper place, the place of a handmaid. Let not her votaries strip the Son of God of his honors to decorate this idol of their vows.

2. When the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, the lips will show forth his praise. This part of the Christian temper is beautifully illustrated by the example of David. What are his psalms but the holy breathings of his devout soul? *Be not deceived: out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* Impudent are that man's pretenses to piety, from whose closet and family the incense of prayer and praise never ascends—equally impudent are their pretensions, who can see, with coolness, the Savior slighted; who can hear, without an indignant emotion, his name reviled. If God is our Father, we cannot be indifferent to his glory: if Jesus is our Redeemer and Friend, every blow aimed at him will be as a sword within our own bones.

3. Since God has thought proper to *ordain strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings*, let us improve the fact for instruction, for admonition, for consolation. Let us improve it for instructing ourselves in the ways of divine providence. In every age, God has conducted, and protected, and prospered his church, by means

which carnal wisdom would pronounce utterly insufficient for the mighty task. When the gospel was about to be published to the world, did he call in the aid of philosophers and kings? Quite the reverse! Rather than employ them, he wrought miracles. He committed the amazing trust to men, most of whom were in every respect contemptible, and whose undertaking could appear little else than the wild revery of a delirium. Yet through Christ strengthening them, they triumphed over all opposition. The history too of later periods, has recorded more than one example in which the plainest truths of the gospel, told in the plainest manner, have entirely confounded the acutest reasoner. This is exactly the apostle's doctrine. *Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.* In a word, God has not only chosen such instruments to gather in his elect, but has commonly the greatest number of his children among people of a similar

description. Let us, therefore, improve the fact for admonition.

That Christians should be abused, and mocked by those who are open enemies to their Lord, is nothing strange: it is no more than they expected. But sooner or later, the great Redeemer will have with such persons a very solemn reckoning. This admonition, however, is not intended for them alone. There are many, with shame, with grief, with indignation be it spoken, there are many who profess the name of Jesus, and yet do not blush to vilify those who love him in sincerity. What more common than to hear the truly pious, especially those who are in the humbler walks of life, branded as hypocrites, enthusiasts, the fanatic rabble, and the like: and this too often by those from whom we had a right to look for other and for better things? Is it not enough, that they are careless about the important concerns which relate to God, eternity, heaven, and hell: but must they condemn as superstitious fools, all who are not willing to be as indifferent as themselves? Is it not enough, that they can see no beauty in the exalted Savior—that they feel not the value of his righteousness, and think they need no supplies from his fullness: but must they reproach as ideots all to whom he is altogether lovely, and who desire nothing so anxiously as

to *live a life of faith upon the Son of God?* Whatever persons who act thus may think of their own characters, they are the most implacable enemies of Christ. He hath said that he considers as done to himself, every indignity done to the least of his brethren: and he hath said, *that whosoever shall offend one of the little ones that believe in him, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea.* Such conduct, however, shall not materially injure the weakest believers—it shall end in disappointment and shame: for it fights against God, who has determined *to ordain strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings.* We may, therefore, improve the fact for their consolation.

Our Lord has told his followers that in the world they shall have tribulation: and one of the bitterest ingredients in their cup of sorrow, is the hatred and insult of professed friends. But let them remember that their mean appearance in the eyes of men, and the obloquy which is heaped upon them, are no barriers to the grace of the Savior, and cannot depreciate them in his esteem. Let them remember that he hath promised to put *their tears into his bottle, to write them in his book:* and that in due time he will raise their voices, though now feeble as the voice of babes and sucklings, to sing the high praises

of their redeeming God; when the mirth of the scorner shall be turned into horror and howling, and his name be covered with deathless infamy.

4. Whilst we magnify that rich grace which provided a redemption for man, let us admire the stupendous method by which it was accomplished. Lost in wonder, let us stand still and see this great sight, the incarnation of the Son of God! Behold! the Creator of the ends of the earth becomes an infant of days—humbles himself to death, even the death of the cross; and descends to the silent tomb! O death, how great was thy triumph in that awful hour! and had the triumph been perpetual, where were our hopes of heaven? But let every heart rejoice that it was not possible our Surety should be kept the prisoner of the grave. God had sworn that his Holy One should see no corruption. He therefore burst the bars of death; and having thus proved himself to be the Son of God, he ascended, a complete conqueror, into the highest heavens. Brethren, if the Lord Jesus so loved sinners of our race—if for them he emptied himself of his glory—if for them he became *a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*—if for them his blood streamed on Calvary—if the sufferings he endured for them, extorted from him that expiring cry which pierced the heavens, shook the earth, and rent the caverns of the tomb—if for

them he bowed to the dust of death—if for them he spoiled principalities and powers, and reassumed the splendors of his former state—if to them he offers, freely, the *redemption purchased by his blood*—the least return we can make, is to devote ourselves wholly to this celestial friend. Let every faculty of our souls, every member of our bodies, every action of our lives, be inscribed with this motto, *Holiness to the Lord!* It is his own command, *My son, give me thine heart.* We may cheerfully obey; for no guilt, no unworthiness, no vileness, can equal the multitude of his compassions. He is able to *save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;* and he hath promised that *them who come to him, he will in no wise cast out.* Let such as either openly or practically deny his divine glory, and the necessity and virtue of his atoning blood, solemnly reflect, that if they do not find, by happy experience, that he is almighty to save; their certain, their fearful, their irretrievable ruin will furnish a tremendous proof that he is almighty to destroy.

Finally, *Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.* Christians, it is a delightful truth, that Jesus the Savior lives, Jesus the Savior reigns; and lives and reigns for you. Let hope, then, lift up her fainting head—Let faith stretch her pinions, wing her flight to the third heavens,

and view the Redeemer enthroned in all the glories of incarnate Deity. Invested with infinite power, he is able and faithful to *keep what you have committed to him. Looking, therefore, unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that doth most easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race set before us.* Let us pray for the influences of his good Spirit, that we may continually grow in grace, till the arrival of that happy hour when *there shall be ministered unto us abundantly an entrance into his kingdom.* Then we shall join with saints and angels in singing the high praises of God our Savior; and this shall be the heavenly anthem: *To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

LECTURE

ON

MATTHEW XXVII. 1—5.

LECTURE.

MATTHEW XXVII. 1—5.

1 *When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.*

2 *And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.*

3 *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,*

4 *Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.*

5 *And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

The deed is done! Treason has accomplished his work. The Son of man is in the hands of sinners. He has been arraigned at their bar, convicted of blasphemy, sentenced to death: and, as if that were too little, reviled, ridiculed, abandoned to the coarsest effusions of malignity, and the most vulgar insolence. All this in the presence and by the hands of ministers of religion! of ministers assembled in solemn council, acting in the name of God, and professing to guard the interests of his truth, and to maintain the purity of his worship! Of all the forms of depravity, there is none so desperate and execrable as that which reigns in wicked ecclesiastics. No heart is so hard, so pitiless, so entirely estranged from all "compunctious visitings,"—no conscience so seared—no spirit so fertile, refined, persevering in barbarity—no thirst for blood so insatiable—no vengeance so cool, so cruel, so devilish, as are to be found in a priest who has sold himself to work iniquity. Whatever it is, it was permitted to take its full sweep, to put forth its whole force, against our Lord Jesus Christ. *He had done no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* But this was the *hour of sinners, and the power of darkness.* "The dunnest smoke of hell" enwrapped their minds; the foulest spirit of the pit swayed their measures; and the malice of the devil and of the

priesthood, expended all its treasures upon Him *who was fairer than the sons of men.* Why, O Savior, was all this shame and sorrow poured into thy cup? Why was thine Almighty power held in abeyance? Where were thy distracting thunders, and thine obedient lightnings? Where those twelve legions of angels, any one of whom could have blasted these conspirators into death? Where the divinity of that eye which in a moment could have looked them into hell? Ah, *How then should the scriptures have been fulfilled that thus it must be!* If the Lord Jesus had exercised his power, he would have hurled instant confusion and perdition among the rebels; and appeared in all his glory as the sinless One. But where, then, would have been the sacrifice for our sins? What the hope of our souls? All thanks be to thee, thou patient Son of God, that thou didst not refuse *the cup which thy heavenly Father gave thee to drink!* The glory of the divine government was to be maintained and vindicated, and his people to be redeemed by the blood of his covenant: therefore, *when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he reproached not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously; and went as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.*

Let us trace the sequel.

The Roman governor had taken away from the Jews the power of inflicting capital punishment. This explains the circumstance mentioned, verse 1. That *when the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people* TOOK COUNSEL *against Jesus to put him to death.* Of their inclination, there can be no doubt; they had already declared him to be *guilty of death;* and had nothing but their mercy stood in the way, they had executed their sentence upon the spot. But considerations of prudence interposed to check the course of malice. Had they ventured to take into their own hands the execution of their own sentence, it would have been such an act of rebellion as might have brought down upon their heads the whole weight of the Roman governor's resentment. It is wisely ordered, in the providence of God, that personal fear often restrains those who are lost to every sense of righteousness and humanity. Here is one of the principal guards which he has placed over the order and peace of civil society. Villains, who are not deterred by the atrocity of their designs, and who make no account of the misery which would follow their success, are often kept within bounds by the fear of consequences to themselves. They do not commit crimes from pure disinterestedness. They wish to see the issue and enjoy the fruits. The cer-

tainty, or even probability, of losing their own lives, is a mighty damper on their courage. Accordingly, the result of the *counsel* which the chief priests and elders of the people held, was to deliver Jesus up to the Roman governor; not doubting that their own influence, aided by such representations as it would cost them no trouble to make, would succeed in destroying their victim, with perfect safety to themselves. In all this there was nothing to be seen but human wickedness, and the ordinary principle of human nature. Who thinks of questioning whether the Jews followed the bent of their own corrupted will? Who thinks of any apology for their sin? Yet there was an invisible hand overruling and guiding their free and criminal actions to the very point which divine preordination had fixed, and divine prescience had declared. The *Messiah was to be cut off* by a death unknown to the Jews. Crucifixion was exclusively a Roman punishment. Yet the Messiah could die in no other way. For this the prophetic spirit had pointed out. It is minutely *described*, because it could not be *named;* as the Jews had not a term to express it in their whole language. Thus saith the Messiah himself, in the twenty-second Psalm: *They* PIERCED MY HANDS *and my* FEET. For this purpose was the empire of the world given to the Romans,

Following only their own ambition, they, in the progress of their conquest, annexed Judea to their provinces, established their laws, abolished the Jewish right of life and death, and substituted the Roman in its stead. Here was proof that the Messiah had come; because *the sceptre was departed from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet.* Thus all circumstances, brought about by men's pursuing their own devices, conspired to accomplish the purposes, and fulfill the promises of God. Thus all were rendered subservient to the kingdom, the salvation, and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is no otherwise at the present hour. The nations rage—the kingdoms are moved—revolution after revolution shakes the earth—plans of aggrandizement are formed for perishing worms—alliances, called holy, are framed for their security—daring spirits break the peace of the world—crimes and horrors multiply. What, brethren, is to be the end? Why, *God standeth in the congregation of the mighty: He sitteth upon the flood; He sitteth King forever.* The potentates, the revolutionists, and the multitude of the world, are doing nothing but *what his hand and counsel determined beforehand to be done.* And while he avenges with blood his dreadful quarrel with bloody men, he is *judging with righteousness for the meek of the earth,* and causing all things to

converge to that centre of his providence, to that magnificent consummation, in which that Jesus who stood as a malefactor before Pontius Pilate, shall appear in his glory, *as the Prince of the kings of the earth, having on his head many crowns.*

Before the completion of this tragedy, in which the chief priests and Pilate were conspicuous actors, the traitor Judas, terrified by the view of his crime which then bursts upon his mind, hastens to the chief priests and makes a voluntary confession: *I have* SINNED *in that I have* BETRAYED THE INNOCENT BLOOD. His Master's uniform goodness and grace stand unclouded before him—his own ingratitude and baseness crowd upon his soul—the wages of treason have lost their charm—shame, remorse, despair, rack his bosom—and he swells his crime, by rushing, unbidden, into the presence of his Judge.

Let us recover ourselves from the terror of this frightful spectacle, and look into the lessons which it preaches to us.

I. The sins of men lead often to results which they do not anticipate.

Judas appears to have flattered himself that no eventual harm would arise from his treason. He had often seen, and perfectly knew, the power of Jesus Christ. He could not imagine that he

would suffer himself to become a victim to his enemies. With infinite ease he could extricate himself and baffle their designs, as he had done before; and thus give a new display of his own superiority, and acquire fresh reputation among the wondering millions, while himself would enjoy his ill-gotten gold. Thus he seems to have reasoned; and if you ask me why he did not reason in the same manner as to himself, when he was negotiating the fall of his Master, I answer, because sinners against God are universally but *half reasoners*. They are sharp-sighted and ingenious in espying out every circumstance which may extenuate or conceal their sin, and always blind to some things which may lead to their detection or punishment, or may conduct their sin to uncomfortable issues. It was the "condemnation" of our Lord Jesus Christ which Judas had not expected, and which awakened him to a fruitless repentance.

Let men, therefore, when they are about committing any known sin; pause a moment and reflect,

1. They know not the *natural* connections of that sin.

They can form no idea of the crime and consequences to which it is nearly or remotely allied. They cannot even guess at the length of the chain with which they propose to entan-

gle themselves; nor how deep a hold they take of hell when they adventure. They know not to what a mine of miseries to their persons, to their fame, to their friends, to the church of God, to the world, to the present race, to generations yet unborn, that sin may be the spring, and which shall explode at their touch.

2. They know nothing of the secret *providence* of God respecting that particular sin.

You promise yourselves pleasure, honor, profit; you cannot see that it will produce any disastrous effects. If they should be naturally connected with it, you flatter yourselves that something shall intervene between you and them to ward off their mischief and leave you in the enjoyment of all their advantages. Perhaps you have already had some hair-breadth escapes. Are there none here whose consciences bear witness that they have been delivered, as if by miracle, from their best grounded fears? God gives many infallible proofs that he is gracious and long-suffering. Do not abuse his goodness. Do not presume upon impunity: imagine not yourselves to be *exceptions* from his rule of dealing with sinners. The very next offense may be your ruin in both worlds. Your hands may even now be weaving the net for your own feet. God may arrest you in a moment when you think not—when you suppose yourself to be perfectly

secure from his visitation—and let the example of Judas warn you, that it is no trifling thing to *fall into the hands of the living God.*

3. We see exhibited in meridian light the accursedness of that maxim, that "the end sanctifies the means."

Was there ever equal benefit to the world, to the universe, to that which redounded from the death of our Lord Jesus Christ? Prophecies fulfilled—God glorified—hell vanquished—sin expiated—sinners saved—angels instructed—the intelligent universe edified, were its immediate and progressive fruits. Did all this diminish the sin or the punishment of Judas the traitor? Was his horror the less? the wrath of God more mitigated? his place of torment the more tolerable? You easily accede to the reprobation of Judas. But hold! *Thou that judgest another, condemnest thou not thyself?* No good to be effected could justify Judas in *his* sin. But do you never, in infinitely smaller matters, set up for your own justification the very principle which you have rejected in his? What means the defense found in the mouths of celebrated moralists, for an imitation of the devil in one of his worst attributes—the practice of telling deliberate lies? Is not evil to be prevented, or good to be effected, the very pith and marrow of that defense? I blush when I think

that such a doctrine has crept into our seminaries of learning to corrupt our youth. What reconciles men's consciences to perjuries in the custom-house, and the daily frauds which are glossed over by false pretenses, but the consideration of their paltry gain? I pursue not the subject. "Let the stricken deer go weep." But be it remembered that the maxim, "*let us do evil that good may come*," by whomsoever adopted, in whatever case or to whatever extent, is the maxim of those *whose damnation is just.*

4. Observe the hardening power of sin.

Judas comes to the chief priests with his ill-gotten wealth in his hand, and acknowledges in most pathetic terms his unprovoked treachery—*I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood!* Does not the confession chill their blood? Does it not instantly stop their proceedings? or at least compel them to pause, and inquire whether they were not about shedding *the innocent blood?* No such thing. With cool malignity they deride alike the majesty of justice and the misery of the traitor. *What is that to us, see thou to that!* What is that to *you?* the ministers of law! the professional maintainers of truth! the protectors of innocence! the commissioned agents of a righteous God? Is it nothing to you that the very wretch who had delivered his Master into your hands hastens to you

with horrible compunction, declares your prisoner guiltless, and wishes to restore the hire of his own infamy? Can you get rid of your share in the crime by throwing all the responsibility upon the distracted traitor? *See thou to that!* Shocking infatuation! But these men had trained their minds by long practice to familiarity with sin. They had neglected, resisted, slandered, persecuted the truth. They had exercised themselves in all the arts which envy, guile, and hatred can suggest, to entrap the Just One. Being constantly foiled, they become intriguers for blood, and seize with avidity the opportunity which the bad faith of a disciple afforded, of glutting their vengeance. Jesus is in their hands; it is enough; they have gone too far to recede; the ultimate crime caps the climax of their iniquity!

O ye who tamper and trifle with the truth of God, look well to your feet! You are upon a declivity which grows steeper the farther you advance. There is an intimate connection between falsehood in principle and criminality in action. God may in righteous judgment give you up to your delusions, till, *hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*, you shall advance from crime to crime, and at last reach that point where you will hold fellowship with the murderers of the

Prince of life, and plunge yourself into bottomless perdition.

5. The power of a *guilty conscience, when fully aroused.*

During the whole time Judas was seeking an opportunity of perpetrating his treason; and until he had completed the execrable deed, and had seen it terminate in his Lord's condemnation, the soul of the traitor was callous; his moral sensibility was stupefied; with the pleasure of covetousness he was contemplating *the wages of unrighteousness:* but his career was over; his work finished; God had abandoned him; his conscience awakens from its stupor; his crime is set before his eyes in its unallayed horrors. Racked with remorse and despair, he throws down the abhorred gold, and departs in agony, unpitied and distracted. Unhappy man! Thy repentance, such as it is, comes too late. It availeth not to arrest the hand of violence against thy Master, nor to save thyself. The furies are pursuing *thee to thine own place*, where thou shalt know the full meaning of thy Master's words, *It were good for that man if he had never been born.* He retires to his house; he seeks relief by self-destruction; nature sinks under the insupportable load; throes of agony stifle his breath and dissolve his frame; *all his*

bowels gush out, and he dies accursed of God, and *an abhorrence to all flesh!*

It is not in order to produce a mere stage effect—to agitate the stronger passions of our nature for the sake of agitating them—that this odious and terrifying spectacle is set before you. Many, too many of those within my hearing at present, have a fearful interest in the story of Judas. They are living in the love and the practice of sin. Their consciences were once tender, and did not fail to admonish them upon the recurrence of their aberrations from the path of known duty. Its admonitions have been disregarded, they grew fainter and fainter, and perhaps have ceased to trouble them. They go on in their sinful course, undisturbed by painful reflections; they hear with indifference, it may be with a smile of contempt, the remonstrances of God's word, the warnings of his providence, the threatenings of his laws. All these pass by them "as the idle wind which they regard not," and they confirm themselves in the persuasion, that *they shall have peace though they walk after the imaginations of their own evil hearts.* Hear then, once more, *ye despisers*, a little plain truth: it may be the last time before some of you "go to your long account."

You have within your bosoms and carry about with you, just such a faculty, with the same

sleepless observation, the same power of recollection and reproach, the same capacity of inexpressible horror, as that which inflicted its punishment upon Judas Iscariot. If, then, you are resolved to persevere in your rebellion against God, why then you must go on, and, if you can, abide the consequences. The day of reckoning will come; it is at hand; it is very near; when all restraints shall be removed from off thy conscience, and all its sensibilities sharpened, and thou shalt feel what it is to grapple with its might and its vengeance. *Now* thy communion is with the *matter* of thy sin, which fills thee with intoxicating joys; *then*, when the vision of truth shall make thee sober, it shall be with the *guilt* of thy sin. Then conscience arises in his majesty to do the work of God's vicegerent. The moment he begins, the stoutest heart trembles. With a precision there is no evading—a determination which can neither be repelled nor postponed; severe integrity which no promises can bribe, and no pleadings mollify, he sets thy sins in order before thy face—not an aggravation nor a circumstance forgotten; excuses and apologies are at an end; every mask is stripped off; the laughter of fools yields no relief; thou must look upon thy sins as disembodied spirits look at them; as the ministering angels who have been their witnesses always looked at them; as they

are seen in the light of Jehovah's countenance. Thou art now where thou canst not shuffle; under the power of that eye which penetrates thy being, and annihilates the consideration of every thing but itself and thy own crimes. Profaned sabbaths—the despised Bible—the neglected sanctuary—lost opportunities—abused mercies—ridiculed convictions—crowd in upon thy mind. As they pass by thee in slow and solemn procession, the hand of each presses thine heart like a millstone. Each one utters in a tone of coming vengeance, "Let me sit heavy on thy soul to-morrow!" Thus circumstanced, conscience overcomes the love of life, and what is often more than life, of reputation. It rips up and discloses sins which had not been suspected and would never have been known. To be disgraced or honored before men cannot command a thought. Equally unable to endure or escape its terrors, he sinks into despair. What aileth thee, thou man of boasting? Is this the son of successful sin? This the gay and gallant youth who laughed at the simplicity of his serious friends, at the fables of the Bible, and the croakings of a faithful ministry? What is become of thy courage? Where is that pleasantry with which thou usedst to sport with that bug-bear, conscience? Ah, he has no reply! He has other employment than to attend to his pitiable

figure in the eyes of men. He has *fallen into the hands of the living God!* It is the hour of the Lord's vengeance! He has nothing but the shriek of despair. The mountains and the rocks flee from the face of his Judge. What shall he do? His profit lost—pleasures lost—fame lost—soul lost—God himself has nothing to do but to punish him. Oh, may some of you say, oh that one from the world of spirits, that some good angel, would interpose to show to men their peril, and reclaim them from their folly! What are you wishing? They have more than apparitions of the dead—more than an angel voice—more than if he were to rend asunder the curtains of death, and to make visible the secrets of the eternal world. More sure than all this, more close and powerful is the warning of God's word. In accents more terrible than the thunder that shakes the heavens—more gentle than the dew-drop upon the springing herb—more tender than a mother's love—does he remonstrate with the rashness of sinners. Hear ye *despisers, and wonder and perish! Look unto me and be saved all the ends of the earth! As I live, saith Jehovah, I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Judah? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kin-*

dled together. Now is the day of the divine forbearance! Now does God wait to be gracious. Now he pleads forcibly, plainly, loudly. Then *To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.* Do you shudder at such an interview as has been exhibited with your own consciences? We proclaim the only method of escape, by having sprinkled upon them the precious blood of Christ, that they may be purged from dead works to serve the living God.

MINISTERIAL FIDELITY ILLUSTRATED AND VINDICATED.

A SERMON,

PREACHED

IN THE COURSE OF ORDINARY MINISTRATION,

MARCH 26, 1831.

SERMON I.

MINISTERIAL FIDELITY, &c.

JOHN XVIII. 23.

If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?

All men, of all sects, agree that the treatment of our Lord Jesus Christ, immediately before the close of his course, exhibited the very highest injustice, and the most cool and consummate depravity. When a criminal is arrested and put upon his plea for life and death, there is something within a man which involuntarily softens down his feelings into those of tenderness. Nor can there be a greater insult offered to the common sympathies of our nature, nor one which would be more speedily and

roughly resented, than any gratuitous indignity; any thing which tends to render his situation more painful. In the case, however, of our Lord and Savior, all the courtesies of life, and all the kindlier attentions of humanity, were denied, with a barbarity which shocks us in the recital. Not one kind action was performed, nor one generous sentiment expressed, during the whole of his trial. He seemed to be interdicted from the common rights, even of those who were destined to public execution. The sanhedrim forgot their majesty, and the high priest his dignity, when Jesus of Nazareth stood before them—forgot themselves so far as to permit vulgar insolence to inflict personal violence upon their prisoner without provocation, and in circumstances which entitled him to protection. On an interrogation about *his disciples and his doctrine*, Jesus referred the high priest to those who had attended his ministry; and a more fair or respectful reference could not have been required. The only notice taken of it, was a blow from *one of the officers who stood by*, with a question after the blow, *Answerest thou the* HIGH PRIEST *so?* Jesus, who knew perfectly well what was due to a court of justice, and those who were arraigned before it, meekly replied, *If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?*

I have chosen to discourse on these words, because they convey a general instruction, both to the official witnesses for truth, and to those who hear their testimony. The one are taught to deliver their message firmly and courageously; and the other to refrain from hasty and especially from passionate judgments.

I. The duty of official witnesses to the truth. It is to speak *well.* And my first remark is,

1. That they have a high and responsible duty to perform, which cannot be slighted or evaded.

God is carrying on in our world the most important design that he was ever pleased to unfold to the contemplation of the universe, the manifestation of his own glory in the salvation of sinful men. A salvation in which his only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, acts the principal part, and forms the great point of reunion both to his own infinite perfections, and the adoration of all holy beings in his empire. It is the object of their study, and the theme of their praise. The minutest portion of its development, such as the repentance of one sinner, puts all heaven in commotion, and creates a new allotment of the services of those who are destined to be ministering spirits. The visible execution of this design he has seen proper to commit to the hands of men—men of like passions with others—in-

volved in the same ruin, redeemed by the same means, and heirs of the same inheritance, with all those who shall see the King in his beauty. The treasure is indeed put into earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God. But though they are earthen vessels, made of dust and returning to the dust, they are raised to the dignity of *fellow-workers with God.* They have his commission in their hands—his promises to animate, and his Spirit to help them. Who that rightly considers the employment would not tremble to undertake it? Who that undertakes it, with a due sense of his own insufficiency, and an humble trust in the support of that God whose he is and whom he serves, will not feel himself infinitely above the fears, the favors, the frowns, the applauses of fellow-worms, and all the petty calculations which find a place in the minds of those who can stoop to be the servants of men?

Commensurate with this mighty trust is the responsibility attached to it. Life for life, blood for blood, in the case of all who perish through carelessness or unfaithfulness, is a terrible alternative; but yet that to which the ministers of God are subjected. *Son of man*, is the divine mandate to Ezekiel, *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them*

warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked man from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand. There is, you perceive, no room left for discretion. The man has a message to deliver, and it must be delivered, as it was given to him, on the peril of his soul. God has taken the issue of his truth into his own hands; how it shall be received, and what the end shall be, is not for us to inquire. The aids of human prudence, and all the expedients of human wisdom, are but the efforts of human impertinence to direct his infinite wisdom, or to assist his almighty power. We have but one concern to mind, and that is, that we be found faithful. Now as all God's messages to sinful men are messages of the Infinite Sovereign to his deluded subjects, who have revolted far away from their allegiance, my next remark is, that,

2. In discharging his duty, the minister of God will come into habitual collision with the predilection, the opinions, the habits of many who hear him.

It seems to be an established point with some who profess Christianity, that they have a right to entertain and publish what opinions they

please. The first part of this proposition is, with respect to human control, above contradiction. But do they not often forget that the jurisdiction of divine authority spreads itself as much over the province of thinking as over the province of acting? that the world of spirits is as really a part of the divine government as the world of matter, only much larger, more comprehensive, and more important? We may then ask, who gave them a right to think contrary to the thoughts of God their Maker? to think what he has forbidden them to think? to cherish in their bosoms direct rebellion against him? and to imagine that all shall pass off unnoticed? In so far as God has revealed himself, he has not only decided what is truth, i. e. what is to rule the inward parts, but he has enjoined his servants to declare it. *He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.* And as thoughts are much more numerous than actions, as they are equally efficients of character in the sight of God, and reach over an immense field of agency, which actions can never touch, they furnish precisely the ground in which truth must have her most desperate conflicts with error; and on which man feels his pride great, and his responsibility little or nothing. To maintain here the truth of God, and to expose every deviation from

it, are among the highest of the high duties which the man of God has to perform. It is here that the transgressor is to be convinced, humbled, converted, and made to sit in his right mind, clothed, and at the feet of Jesus. It is here that the fidelity of those who profess to be teachers of the gospel is chiefly tried; and that the true disciple of Jesus Christ is to keep his ground, unmoved, unshaken, though he stand alone, the single witness for his Savior, among a faithless and perverse generation. He must encounter, as his Lord did before him, the contradiction of sinners; and the worst and most obstinate of all contradictions, that of philosophical sinners, who claim a bolder privilege than any others to make free with the word of God, to contradict its language, to fritter away its sense, and to expunge every thing which does not accord with the dictates of their corrupt, and, falsely called, enlightened reason.

They who are the objects of evangelical instruction and remonstrances, are also distinguished by their habits of transgression. God commands one thing, and they practice another. The moral law, in all the extent of its obligation, as a spiritual law, lies across their path. They are vastly fond of moral preaching, but that is, when it shuts out the salvation and the Savior of God's providing—when it opens to

them some avenue, something which lets in a glimpse of hope that they may be saved by works of righteousness that they have done. And to quote the words of one who was much abused for preaching the gospel of the *grace* of God, "O that men were as fond of *doing* good works, as of being *saved* by them!" But to urge upon them such moral conduct as the law of God requires, and the Spirit of God suggests, is at once to put them at variance with the world that lieth under the power of the evil one; is to call them to come out from among them, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing: and the promise of God himself, that he will be a Father unto them, and they shall be his sons and his daughters, falls lighter than a feather upon their ear.

It cannot be but that this contrariety between the commands of God and the practices of men, must produce a strong, though very possibly a smothered hostility, against the plain declarations of the one, and denunciations of the other. Sinners do not love to be told that the end of these things is death. They love, under a Christian garb, to be soothed, and flattered, and be assured that all shall be well at last. And though conscience side with the truth, they will rather side with the flatterer, and agree to count as an enemy him that tells them the truth.

Their feelings are like those of the king of Israel, who hated Micaiah the son of Imla, because he never prophesied good to him, but always evil. Micaiah was a prophet of Jehovah; and Ahab a prince of pre-eminent wickedness who sold himself to work iniquity. There was therefore no room to *prophesy good to him*, for there was nothing good about him; and it was the work of the prophet to *withstand him to the face.* The case was not much different with the apostle of the Gentiles. For a while the Gentile converts were enthusiastically attached to Paul. *They received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.* So great was their affection, that *if it had been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to him.* But after false and smooth-tongued teachers had crept in among them, and had gained their ear, all this *blessedness* disappeared: and the faithful apostle was suspected, traduced, treated as an enemy. It is doubtless no easy matter to declare the whole counsel of God, when your doctrine must sear, and scathe, at every step, men highly useful in the community, men of amiable and generous tempers, men with whom you are in the habit of personal intimacy, and who may be in many respects your kindest and most valuable friends. I speak not of invidious personalities, nor of discourses so

constructed as to be aimed at individuals, than which nothing can be more mean and cowardly, nor more unworthy of a minister of the cross. But in stating and urging general truths, in describing characters as they appear in real life, and of which the originals meet you by thousands in every crowd, principles, affections, habits, must be touched in a manner that will be very sore to some, and those whom you think not, in every assembly that can be collected. And the more plainly and faithfully you perform your duty, the more frequently will this recur. But blows often repeated, however unintentionally as to the individuals, excite first pain, next irritation, and then alienation. It is not in human nature, where the conscience has not become callous, and is not driven to Jesus Christ, to endure patiently those flagellations which it is the business of truth to inflict upon every form of error and ill conduct. Even zealous friendship at length gives way, and is succeeded by dislike, if not by hatred. These things are exceedingly distressing, especially to minds of a softer mould: and they beset a man with more dangerous snares than can be laid by open hostility. The appeals which they make to kindness, to tenderness, to gratitude, though altogether misplaced, will go much farther to stagger resolution, and to undermine fidelity, than

the most vehement direct attacks. Against an avowed adversary, it is comparatively easy to hold your position. The mind braces itself up, and the very principle of resistance furnishes both resource and energy. But against the gentle, the friendly, the humane, it is very hard to keep up a warfare, and very natural to relax what may be thought the harder features of truth. Yet this must be done; done steadily, done without respect of persons, by him who, in the language of the text, *speaks well.* His anxiety must be, and is, not to commend himself to men's notions, to their prejudices, to their wishes, but to their *consciences in the sight of God;* and to acquit himself, not as one that pleaseth men, but God who searcheth the hearts. Infinitely more valuable in his eyes, than all the applauses of perishing judges, is his ability to say to his hearers, *I take you to witness, that I am pure from the blood of all men.* And more deep and lasting is the respect given to such a declaration, backed by the testimony of conscience, than by the loudest peals of popular applause.

Such is the duty and such the present recompense of them who "speak well." Let us now turn to the

II. Point of consideration, the duty of those who hear, to refrain from hasty and intemperate

judgments. *If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?*

The earth scarcely furnishes a more interesting spectacle than an assemblage of sinful men met together in the presence and for the purpose of worshiping God. The glorious majesty of their King—the contrast between his infinite holiness and their unworthiness—his wonderful condescension in treating with them at all—the nature of their employment in the house of prayer—the homage which they are to render to him as the universal Sovereign—their sins to be confessed—their complaints to be poured out before him—their wants, their weaknesses, their perils, to be spread before his gracious notice—that exhibition of his doctrine—that correction of their errors—those rebukes for their faults—that instruction in righteousness for which his word is profitable and is intended to convey—the tremendous consequences which hang upon them—what calmness, what tenderness, what a subdued spirit, what candor, what docility, do they not require and imply? Surely we have a right to expect a disposition like that of the centurion's friends, when Peter as a minister of grace visited them. *Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*

But the depravity of men abusing their great privileges, the frequent recurrence of divine worship, has perverted this majestic scene to quite other ends, has almost driven the thought of God out of their minds, and to account the assembling of themselves together to be little else than a means of their own gratification. To entering within themselves and there instituting a fair self-examination they are utter strangers; but are either fond admirers, or listless hearers, or fastidious critics and imperious judges. Yet every one expects that his particular humor shall be pleased. The consequence is exactly what might have been anticipated. No man, who intends to be faithful, can possibly perform an exercise without displeasing somebody.

When the pulpit arraigns prevailing sin, calls it by its own name, and points the divine denunciations against it, some, whom the remarks of the preacher happen to strike, immediately take fire. They cannot deny the truth, but think "*there* was no necessity for being so particular." They even imagine that he must have received some information concerning them, and that he has been exposing them to the whole congregation. The affair becomes personal; the hearer is not profited, and the preacher is abused. In the mean time he was perfectly innocent of the design imputed to him, and his angry auditor does

not suspect or wish to conceal the fact that the supposed informer has never been out of his own bosom. And although, "in drawing his bow at a venture," the speaker may not exactly hit an individual, yet his shaft may fly farther, and do severe execution among a class, whom some present reckon among their friends; and forthwith the feelings of friendship are kindled, and a man deems it necessary to be highly indignant because his friends are touched. Their offenses may be very flagrant, the general description very just, and the censure indisputably scriptural, yet the zeal of friendship cannot be satisfied without lighting, if possible, a fire of high, flaming resentment against the preacher. It is indeed setting a high value upon his friendship to suppose that it shall stop the mouth of truth, and screen the most notorious sinners from reprehension, because they are *his* friends. If he could arrest the arm of Justice, and protect them from the notice and the curse of his Maker, his jealousy would be of some moment. Till then it is as foolish as it is impotent.

Sometimes sins of great atrocity in civil transactions become very frequent in the community, and from the numbers who are involved in them, are scarcely thought to be a reproach. Their turpitude is merged in their frequency, and men begin to think they may sin with impunity,

when they can sin without disgrace. If then a minister of the gospel lay hold of these fashionable transgressors; if he bring them to the bar of God, and show them that in *his* sight numbers are no apology for crime, and from his hand cannot effect an escape; if he dispute the Christianity of all who, under whatever pretext, live in the commission of deeds which they know to be contrary to the commandments of God, and insist that they must be new men in heart, and lead lives of new obedience, before they can make the least claim to the possession of eternal life, why then the provocation assumes a different shape. They who smart under the fair application of the rod, discover that the preacher has traveled out of the limits of his commission; that he injures himself and his cause by meddling with things which do not belong to him; "Let him," is their practical language, "let him confine himself to the doctrines and duties of Christianity, and not thrust himself into concerns which are out of his sphere, and where nobody thanks him for his intrusion." What storms of wrath have men excited in this way, when, for example, they have ventured to touch the sinful party politics of the day, or to bring the power of truth to bear upon a favorite political sinner! How impatient is a party-man under the rebuke of his iniquities! How strenu-

ously does he argue against the impertinence of Christianity interposing to check his most flagrant transgressions, or even against the divine law itself undertaking to control his excesses, and to dictate his moral course! Of all this you are yourselves sufficient witnesses.

On the other hand, when a man teaches boldly the doctrines of the gospel; when he presses them home upon the conscience; when he exposes to just detestation those "damnable heresies" which subvert the whole "gospel of the grace of God," and people the regions of despair with the victims of their seduction; how loud is the cry against his "bigotry," his "uncharitableness," his "unchristian temper," his "pride," his "ferocity," his "damning spirit," and the other amiable attributes in which rational Christianity is ever ready to array him.

All these forms of treating the minister of religion are very common, and they fall to his lot nearly in proportion to his honesty. And what are they but "smiting" him for "speaking" well? He has set men at variance with their own conscience, and they try to make themselves amends by reviling him, and casting out his name as evil. But the facts remain as they are. Doctrines of devils will be doctrines of devils still, though all the friends and servants of the devil fret and rave. Sinful habits will be sinful habits still,

and as much exposed to the righteous judgment of God, though a whole world of sinners conspire to excuse them and to uphold one another, and rend the air with their clamors against him that reproveth in the gate. God's holy truth is still his holy truth, though it be rejected and scorned by the wretched unbelievers whom it was revealed to save, and involves as terrible a responsibility on their part. Considering these things, the hearers of the gospel are not to form rash and hasty judgments. It is unwise, unfair, and may be ruinous. When their consciences get a prick—when their notion or opinions are condemned—when their practices are severely arraigned—they are not forthwith to fly into a passion, to flout at the preacher's doctrine, to resent it as a personal insult, and to heap injurious epithets upon him. This refutes nothing, establishes nothing but your own unreasonableness and obstinacy. If you think that he "has spoken evil," the Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed the proper course, "Bear witness of the evil."

The word of God is the universal and infallible standard of truth, by which every opinion, principle, and practice, must be tried; and according to which it must stand or fall. The testimony by which you are to show that a preacher of righteousness has spoken evil, is the

contrariety of his doctrine to the divine word. Bring his declarations most freely to this ordeal. Lay your finger upon any part of what God is pleased to teach, and demonstrate to the preacher, and to all the world if you please, that he has contradicted the teachings of inspiration. When you shall have proved that he has not spoken *as becometh the oracles of God*, you will convict him, to some purpose, of having *spoken evil.* You will be yourselves more established in the faith of the gospel—you will edify your brethren—will do good service to the Christian cause—will bid fair to correct the mistake of the man himself, leading him to sounder views, promoting his own growth in grace, and subserving his usefulness in the church of God. I submit to yourselves, my brethren, a much more rational, dignified, honorable, and profitable proceeding, than the common method of growing angry, and indulging in ill-natured and bitter remarks. You may possibly discover that what you reject as false, or resent as improper, may turn out, upon investigation, to be the very truth of God. And you may have been all the while revenging a supposed affront upon your Maker himself. And this may draw after it serious consequences to your everlasting welfare. For you must remember that when the preacher has laid before you the truth of God, he has delivered his mes-

sage; and he has delivered his soul. Not a drop of your blood shall be found in his skirts, in that day of reckoning. The moment he has done, responsibility ceases with him, and it passes over to you. Take heed then, that in your displeasure against him, you be not found fighting against God. I would recommend the same course to you, when you happen to be much pleased. Do not take it for granted that every thing agreeable is therefore safe. Apply the touch-stone; ask your counsel at the mouth of the Lord as he has spoken in your Bible. Peradventure this pleasing thing may be only the craft and sleight of deceivers. You may have been drinking poison for the pure water of the river of life; and may correct your error in time to save your own soul, and to testify against the evil speech and the evil speaker.

In the next place, sit down and commune with your own heart, open your eyes upon the scenes that are passing around you: and inquire whether that with which you are disgusted may not only be true, but *seasonable* truth.

It is freely conceded, that there may be much unprofitable preaching where there is no error. Every syllable may be scriptural truth, and yet the effect be positively bad. Truth it is, but not the truth suited to the time and place. It is pitiable to think of the mischiefs which proceed

from the want of a little ministerial prudence. But these are cases which excite contempt rather than animosity. They lower respect for a man's understanding, and seldom expose him to hatred and reproach. What mankind perceive to be absurd, they generally account harmless. But it is different where they are vexed, and show themselves to feel very sore. It is truth—the refuting or condemning present error—reproving some present sin—detecting some gross self-deception—reproving some lawless affection—making men feel criminal while they resolve to adhere to their crimes that rouse the malevolent tempers. Their consciences are disturbed, while their lusts are exposed; and they endeavor to pacify the one and to screen the other, by quarreling with the doctrine, or the preacher who has been unceremonious enough to interrupt their repose, or embitter their gratifications. When the fire of divine truth has been well directed, it is the wounded that cry out. As surely as there is any tender spot, any vulnerable point, they who are conscious of its being theirs, shrink and wince, as the surgeon-touch approaches the disordered place, and he begins to apply the medical knife. So then it may and often does happen, that the doctrine which gives most pain, and causes most displeasure, to some hearers, is not only truth, but the very truth which the oc-

casion calls for. The preacher would have been faithless had he concealed it or softened it down. He might have pleased a part of his audience, and have fallen at the same moment under the displeasure of God. And while he was puffed up with the praises of his fellow-worms, he might for the same deed, be transfixed with the spear of the Almighty. Nay, my friends, we cannot afford to purchase your favor upon such terms—the price is too enormous. Our souls are infinitely too precious to be so wantonly and so cheaply thrown away.

Before then any of you begin to *smite* the man who has discomposed you, seriously inquire whether his stroke was not only well deserved, but well timed. He may have been doing nothing but his duty: may have been performing a work of real benevolence, of Christian charity, towards you: resembling the skillful physician, who, disregarding the cries, the threats, or the anguish of his patient, is intent upon one thing, performing his operation well. O remember that the wounds of a friend are faithful, but the kisses of an enemy deceitful. That he wounds you for your good—such smiting will not break your head: it will rather be a precious oil, both healing by its virtue, and refreshing by its fragrance.

I may in drawing to a close be permitted to remark,

1. That a spirit of criticism, especially of captious criticism, is one of the worst possible frames of mind in which a hearer of the gospel can place himself. God is dishonored, his awful majesty affronted, his truth accounted suspicious, the soul is not edified, the church not unfrequently scandalized, her most faithful ministers persecuted, by its prevalence. One would be almost tempted to imagine that some persons attend the church as a very convenient place for getting angry. Like restive steeds who are always on the look-out for something to be frightened at, they seem to be constantly on the watch for something which may discompose and irritate them. If there be any such present, let me affectionately warn them that they are themselves the greatest enemies of their own salvation. The gospel has done and is doing them no good —the sabbath is employed to draw tighter around them the cords of their spiritual bondage—and the great means which God has provided for breaking their thralldom and setting them at liberty, are rendered fruitless by their own fault. How much better to take your seats in his house, humbly, reverentially, disposed to submit the pride of your heart and your understanding to his high authority, inquiring *what the Lord saith*

unto his servants. This is the way of waiting at wisdom's doors, and in which you may expect to receive blessings from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of your salvation.

2. How little reason ministers of the gospel have to shrink from the duty in order to avoid the rash and passionate judgments of their hearers.

Like Paul, they are to declare as far as they know it, the whole counsel of God; if like him, they hope to be pure from the blood of all men. Their only concern in this matter is to see that they speak the truth of God, and speak it seasonably, and properly: about all the rest, as regards themselves, they are to be perfectly indifferent. They have spoken well; and the gainsayings, and abuse, and slander, of men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith, ought to be, in their eyes, lighter than vanity. It is a small thing, says faithful Paul, for me to be judged of you, or of man's judgment; he that judgeth me is the Lord. Of all his hasty critics who cannot endure sound doctrine, there is not one who will take our Lord's advice, and *bear witness of the evil.* Well then, let them pursue their own course. They have done with the minister, when he, as a man of God, has finished his message. But they have not done with the consequences of his ministration. The question

is now between God and their souls, and an awful question it is; as they will find it to be when he shall summon them to his bar, and deal with them in righteousness; when all the small excuses which pass current on earth, will be utterly annihilated, for slighting and rebelling against his living oracles. When they shall call in vain to the rocks and mountains to hide them from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and the rocks and mountains shall flee away and leave them naked to his eye, then shall the preacher of righteousness lift up his head with joy, and have an inconceivable recompense in that approving voice and those cheering words of his righteous Judge, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of your Lord.*

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

SERMON II.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

1 TIM. VI. 12.

Fight the good fight of faith.

Whoever has read the records of truth, must frequently have remarked, that the life of a Christian is almost always mentioned in metaphorical terms. This fact is so far from being a blemish in divine revelation, that it is a shining beauty in itself, and an invaluable blessing to us. We are so immersed in sense, that it is impossible for us to speak without speaking more or less figuratively, and equally impossible to feel the propriety of any discourse which does not abound with allusions to sensible objects. Even that

language, which we employ in expressing our thoughts on immaterial things, is borrowed from the material world. As this disposition appears to result inevitably from the connection between soul and body, and the influence which external objects have upon both, it must remain while our present circumstances remain. And the most honorable end to which we can direct it is to make it subservient to our knowledge and experience of eternal realities. We are happy in having before us an example which we may safely follow, for this is the use which God himself has designed to make of it. He graciously adapts himself to our frailty, and addresses us in language calculated to rouse attention and animate exertion. He summons all nature to our aid. He represents the duties, the difficulties, the dangers, the delights of our heavenly calling, by figures which tend to make the deepest impression; which tend at once to chase away sloth and enkindle ardor, to humble our pride and exalt his grace. He holds up our progress unto his kingdom of glory under the ideas of a journey, a pilgrimage, a race, a wrestling, and as in our text, a warfare—a warfare too of the most formidable kind—a warfare in which courage, firmness, fortitude, diligence, patience, and perseverance must be kept in continual and vigorous exercise. But while our Lord shows us the

hardships, he shows us also the advantages of his service, and the means he has provided for our safety, our comfort, our success. Let us, therefore, in the order which the text points out, view the Christian life as a *fight*, as a *good* fight, and as the good fight of *faith*.

I. Let us consider the Christian life as a *fight*.

Yes, believer, you are surrounded with foes whom you cannot shun. You must vanquish them, or they will destroy you. Inaction will cost you dear. Put on, then, the whole armor of God. Gird yourselves for the battle. And that you may feel the necessity of *quitting yourselves like men*, come, let us climb the heights of Zion, and reconnoitre our enemies. Skillfully are their encampments formed, and strongly intrenched. A triple league is combined against you—a league consisting of the powers of darkness, the world, and the corruptions of your own hearts.

1. The powers of darkness.

Every day's experience furnishes a practical proof of the enmity which subsists between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Satan and his host of apostate angels, actuated by the same spirit which lost them heaven and hurled them into hell, are constantly and indefatigably employed in scattering misery through the works, and attempting to subvert the govern-

ment, of God. Their rage is particularly excited against the honor of Christ and the triumphs of his grace. Whenever the Holy Spirit commences his saving operations in the souls of men, and the Redeemer with his almighty arm shakes to its centre the kingdom of destruction, all the legions of hell are roused into action. They combine their joint and furious efforts to render ineffectual a work that shall infallibly succeed. And though they well know this, yet so implacable is their spite against the Lord Christ, that if they cannot counteract the power nor arrest the progress of his grace, they will exert all their strength in disturbing the peace and tormenting the hearts of the objects of his love. Nor, when the soul is united to the Mediator and safe for eternity, do they either lessen their malice or remit their activity. The moment, therefore, that a sinner flies to Jesus Christ, he proclaims war against all the fiends of darkness; and if he once draw the sword, he must throw away the scabbard. As Christ has no concord with Belial, he will not allow it in his followers. They must enter into no reconciliation, no truce, no parley with their enemies, but are bound, are sworn to maintain a sore and perpetual conflict. That in this conflict they receive many a wound, and many a fall, and are forced to utter many a

groan, Christians can well attest, and no wonder that this often happens, for

(1.) Their adversaries are very powerful.

Intelligences of a superior order possess abilities and powers considerably greater than those of an inferior nature. Unincumbered too with bodies, they enjoy no small advantage over those whose movements are impeded by a load of gross and corruptible matter. Their agency in the material worlds notorious fact proves to be very astonishing. Their influence upon the persons and the minds of men is neither less extensive nor less undeniable; and did not the restraining providence of God tie up their hands, we should fearfully experience their strength. These reflections are supported by the authority of scripture. The devil is there compared to a roaring lion—to a strong man armed—to a great dragon vomiting a flood of waters. He is called the prince of the power of the air. We are said to wrestle, not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, and believers are commanded to put on the whole armor of God. All these things indicate enemies formidable and powerful.

(2.) They are not only powerful but numerous.

My name is Legion, said the hellish tribe which had seized the poor demoniac; *my name is Legion, for we are many.* Think you, then, that

the Christian can proceed in his way to Zion without fierce opposition? Quite the reverse. He no sooner takes a step in the heavenly journey, than he is attacked by a host of enemies, who unite their forces in the attack. He must dispute every inch of his ground till he reach his Father's house. Often must he travel with a sad and heavy heart, while his foes beset him on every side, and lay siege to every avenue of his soul. Ah, Christian, you would soon fall a prey to their teeth, was not your *help laid on One who is mighty to save.*

(3.) They are as malicious as they are numerous.

It is the very essence of malignity to commit injury without the smallest prospect of advantage. This is the precise case of the devil and his angels. They hate the Lord Jesus, and let slip no opportunity of testifying their hatred. But as they cannot mount up into heaven, and vent their malice against his blessed person, they endeavor to strike at himself by vexing those who bear his image. Although they know that they cannot destroy the children of God while their Redeemer lives, yet they do not desist. Although they are sensible that they are preparing for themselves a more terrible condemnation, they still persevere. Although they were foiled by the Captain of salvation, and are foiled

by those who fight under his banners, they still renew the combat. Do not dream, then, Christians, of peace, while you are on this side heaven. Your adversaries will press you with the utmost virulence in every part where they find you vulnerable. They showed no quarter to your Lord, and they will be far from showing any to you.

(4.) In addition to their malice, they possess great knowledge and equal art.

Not to mention that evil spirits are naturally capable of grasping, in one view, more objects than we can imagine, the practice of near six thousand years must have furnished them with a large stock of experience. Veterans in rebellion against God, and trained to the ruin of man, they cannot but be expert in deeds of wickedness. The scripture, therefore, speaks of *the depths of Satan*—of *the snare of the devil*—and the apostle Paul says, *we are not ignorant of his devices.* They are indeed devices which are neither understood nor suspected without illumination from on high. Satan is well acquainted with the tempers and circumstances of mankind, and can tell, often more exactly than themselves, *the sin that doth most easily beset them.* He accordingly adapts himself to the taste of those whom he tempts, and plans his stratagems so as to render them most effectual. *Be sober*, then, Christians, *be vigilant*, that your understandings

be not blinded by the craft, that your feet be not caught in the snare, of your enemies; but in all cases let your appeal for instruction be to the *law and to the testimony;* and your recourse for aid to Him, who hath all power in heaven and in earth.

(5.) These adversaries of God's people are indefatigable.

Never was chemist more indefatigable in scrutinizing the composition and qualities of bodies, than is Satan in studying the human heart. Never was an active and able general more assiduous in striving to vanquish his antagonist, either by superior force or by surprise, or by drawing him into an ambuscade, or by overreaching him in any other military manœuvre, than is Satan in attempting to gain the victory over the children of light. With an eagle's eye he watches all their motions. If the sons of God present themselves before him, Satan never fails to present himself along with them. If they go to the house of prayer, Satan goes too; and when he is there, he is never idle, however many of the hearers may be. Whence comes it to pass that such a multitude of memories, which are very faithful and retentive in the affairs of life, grow so very treacherous as soon as people enter a place of public worship, that they can scarcely carry away a single truth which

concerns their eternal peace? It is because that arch-thief steals away the word from their hearts, and most of the hearers permit him to steal it very quietly. Why are the minds of those who truly seek the Lord often more distracted with vain, wandering, blasphemous thoughts, while they wait upon God in his ordinances, than at other times? It is because Satan is then most busy in trying to keep them from contemplating the person and feeding upon the fullness of their Savior. He does not stop here. When Christians retire to their secret devotions, Satan is at their heels; and what chamber so close as to shut out the fiend? If they quit their solitude, and mingle with the society of their friends, Satan is sure to make one of the party. Ah! believers, you cannot sufficiently know the importance of your Lord's command to watch, nor the necessity of observing it. The devil sets his gins in every spot, and if you are so happy as to avoid one that is designed for you now, you cannot take the next step ere he will fix another. If the good hand of God prevent you from falling into the pit which he has prepared for you here, he will speedily dig one yonder. If you escape both the net and the pit, he will plant your path with thorns, and render painful every step you take. One would suppose that opposition like

this is enough to shake the most courageous faith; but formidable as it is, it is only a part of that which he has to encounter. He finds,

2. A host of enemies in the world.

By the world, in scripture, we are sometimes to understand the men of the world, and sometimes the things of the world. In both these senses the world is a mortal enemy to the peace of the Christian, and to his comfortable progress in the divine life.

(1.) The men of the world are decided and uniform enemies to the Christian.

It is long since One who could not err told us, *In the world ye shall have tribulation.* His first followers experienced the truth of this information in its most tremendous extent. Like their brethren of old, (for the righteous have always resembled each other as well in their fate as in their character,) *they had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings; yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.* These, and every other species of torture which malignity can invent, or barbarity execute, they endured for their faithfulness to Christ and his gospel. The history too of later ages, and men from whose profession and knowledge we might have

expected other conduct, records many a horrid tale of the sufferings of those who held fast the testimony of Jesus.

But though God, in his kind providence, has wrested from the hand of persecutors the murdering sword and the blazing faggot, so that his people no longer bleed on the scaffold, nor fry at the stake, yet we must not imagine that the carnal world and they are on better terms than formerly. Since the first promise was given to Adam, *He that was after the flesh has persecuted him that was after the spirit*, he does so yet, and will continue to do so while the devil has a particle of empire upon earth. It cannot be otherwise, for the righteous and the wicked differ so widely in their characters, in their motives of action, in their joys and sorrows, in their interests, in their objects, and in their prospects, that an agreement between them is simply impossible. The scripture is decisive on this point. *The carnal mind*, says Paul, *is enmity against God*, and therefore cannot love any thing that looks like him. The case of some whom Christ calls to follow him exactly tallies with the case of Abraham. How often has it happened that God singles out from a graceless family one of its members to be an heir of eternal life. He speaks in the powerful application of his word, *Get thee out from thy country, and from thy kindred, and*

from thy father's house. But mark the consequence. No sooner does the Holy Spirit arrest the attention of this chosen vessel, embitter to him the pleasures of sin, and excite a serious concern for his immortal soul, than his impious relatives use every exertion to stifle in their birth those blessed convictions, which they affect to esteem a disease or a madness. Authority, entreaty, stratagem, threats, are alternately employed. Every principle of human action is artfully plied with arguments calculated to make the deepest impression; and nothing is omitted which promises either to soothe or frighten the soul from Christ. They, who have been thus tried, know it to be a sore persecution. But they are not alone. All who profess Christ must be persecuted in some shape or other; for they *who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.* In no age have they been exempted. But to some will appear unaccountably strange what I am going to assert, that notwithstanding the high panegyrics which we constantly hear on the rapid progress that mankind are making in a noble and happy liberality in religious sentiment, there never has been, since the expulsion of Adam from paradise, a a period in which a certain species at least of persecution was exercised, with more bitterness and rancor against the people of God, than at

this moment. Many, indeed, will swell with indignation at what they may deem a groundless calumny, and exclaim, is it possible that the fair character of our polite, our liberal, our philosophic day, is stained with persecution? You may startle, but it is a truth; and the most noisy pretenders to enlightened philosophy are the most active in the unworthy pursuit. What is their boasted liberality? If a judgment might be formed from their conduct, one would imagine that it consists in freedom from the influence of principle and the restraints of decency. Look around you. Is it not a fact that every thing serious and sacred is ridiculed with the most shameless effrontery by multitudes of those who affect to be the genteeler world? Is it not a fact that the doctrines of God's holy word are the mirth of the licentious, and that they who wish to regulate their hearts and lives by its salutary precepts, become the mockery of the profane? Nay, is not the infection so general and so deep, that even the young, whose purest happiness and most exalted honor lie in consecrating their powers to the Lord Jesus, are so ashamed of their glory, so glory in their shame, as to commence their career of liberal philosophy by opening their mouths against the heavens? If any begin to *remember their Creator in the days of their youth*, and are not willing to go to hell

with the crowd, what do their gay acquaintances think and say of them? They laugh at and despise them as poor, weak, melancholy, crazy fools. Yes, young Christians, you in particular must expect to be the scoff of impiety; you must endure the mortification to be branded with the opprobrious epithets of madmen, enthusiasts, hypocrites, and the like—nay, to be *the song of the drunkard.* I know you will find it hard to bear; you will feel the force of the psalmist's petition to be kept *from the strife of tongues.* But be not disheartened, young believer; your Lord met with no better treatment; and *if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household?* Oh! see that you add not to the number of those unhappy mortals, who, though they gave their names to Christ, can hear him reviled, and never utter a syllable for his honor—who shrink at the sneer of malice—whose faith is blown away by the breath of profanity—who barter their souls and heaven for a jest.

But the Christian's danger does not arise from those only who are open infidels. His graceless connections, who are more sober in their principles, and more decent in their practice, are no contemptible snare. A pleasant temper and engaging manners, especially if joined with polished education, with opulence and honors, steal

upon the affections, throw the heart off its guard, and not only render it liable to be surprised by other temptations, but insensibly draw it into forbidden paths. This enemy to your peace advances under a form so sweet and smiling, that it is hardly possible either to suspect her treachery or resist her persuasions. Here you have need of continued watchfulness, great self-denial, much of that *wisdom which cometh from above*, and unfailing supplies of strength from Christ your head.

2. The Christian is not only opposed by the men, he is trammeled also by the things of the world.

Immersed in sense, and imperfect in his graces, the most experienced saint requires to be often reminded that here he *has no continuing city*, but is a *pilgrim and a stranger*. We are more prone to nothing than to misplace our blessings. When God showers down upon us the bounties of his providence, we too frequently give them that affection which belongs exclusively to the Lord Christ. Every new comfort is apt to twist a new cord round our hearts; and they tie themselves so firmly, that nothing but almighty grace can loosen the knot. Divine is the lesson, and they alone who are divinely taught will practice it, to abound in this world's goods and yet to *set their affections on things*

above. Far different is the effect which prosperity has on the multitude of those who enjoy it. It is recorded of Israel, that when the Lord *slew them then they sought him.* But no sooner did he visit them with peace and plenty, than *Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked.* Instead of raising higher his hymn of gratitude, he *tempted and provoked the most high God, and turned aside like a deceitful bow.* Prosperity has detected many a rotten professor; and it becomes the affluent not to forget what our Lord has said of *the deceitfulness of riches,* especially since he has so solemnly declared that *it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man,* or as he himself explains it, *them who trust in riches, to enter into the kingdom of heaven.* Often do we see his curse fearfully verified, *Wo unto you, ye rich, for ye have received your consolation.* Mistake me not, brethren. I mean not to rail against wealth as a thing evil in itself, nor to insinuate that the enjoyment of it is a crime. All the creatures of God are good; and if he has distinguished you by opening his liberal hand and pouring plenty into your dwellings, these gifts of his bounty are to be received with thankfulness and improved with care. But that they expose you to dangerous temptations, that they have actually proved a fatal snare to many, you must acknowledge; and if you belong to

Christ, it will not be difficult to convince you that you need more watchfulness and more grace than others, and that there is much necessity for this divine caution, *If riches increase, set not your hearts upon them.*

The same may be said of the honors of the world. Hurried with the business of office, surrounded by the irreligious, and flattered by the obsequiousness of those who court their favor, men of high station are in circumstances very unfavorable to warm and humble piety. And although it may be thought superfluous to enlarge on this topic, as there appear to be but few of the Lord's people who fill places of earthly dignity and power, yet it is not superfluous to entreat them to guard against an anxiety for a situation that will lay them open to the hazard of many sinful compliances—that will cool their ardor in pressing forward toward the mark, the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus—and be to them hereafter a fruitful source of bitter regret. Whilst the old leaven remains, they will sometimes feel the workings of a temper which *loves the praise of men more than the praise of God;* and as they are required to *run with patience the race set before them,* they should listen to the voice from heaven, commanding them to *lay aside every weight,* and not incur the guilt of

disobedience by tying new ones about their necks.

If riches, if honors, are hostile to the travelers who are marching to Zion, surely carnal pleasure cannot be their friend. The desire of ease and sensual gratification is so interwoven with man's present frame, that he seldom makes a resistance so feeble and ineffectual, as when attacked in this quarter. Never does he commit such egregious blunders, as when he undertakes to value the enjoyments of sense. Viewing objects through a false and jaundiced medium, he must inevitably pronounce a false and pernicious judgment; whilst unhallowed propensities giving him frequently no time for reasoning or reflection, urge him into rash and destructive actions. We cannot advance far in the ways of Christ, without knowing the painful struggle which is necessary to withstand the allurements of pleasure. Let those who profess the religion of Jesus fix it in their minds as a most important truth, that we must employ continued vigilance and prayer if we would escape her entanglements. To those particularly who are in the bloom of life I address myself. Flee from her blandishments. Her cords are silken, but they are strong, and draw to ruin. Taste not the mixture of her cup: 'tis sweet indeed, but fraught with death. Trust not her innocent and enchanting appear-

ance: it is the cloak of treachery; and whilst you listen to her syren tongue, and are fascinated with her bewitching smiles, she is aiming at your bosoms a mortal blow.

What think you now, brethren, of the Christian life? Is it not a life of toil, of hardships, of peril? Is the representation now given of it widely different from that which your experience has realized? Has the profession of the gospel cost you no fightings, no fears, no trouble? Then, brethren, deceive not yourselves: you have serious reason to doubt your relation to the Lord Jesus; and this alarming idea will be confirmed when I tell you that you have not yet heard the whole of those trials which fall to the lot of a believer. He finds a

Third class of terrible enemies in the corruptions of his own heart.

A Christian is a singular phenomenon—he has within him two moral principles directly contrary to each other, both in their nature and in their operations. They must, therefore, and do keep up an unceasing conflict. *The flesh*, says Paul, *lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these two are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.* On this text, the daily experience of God's people is the best commentator. Every rising and setting sun furnishes them with some new proof,

that though implanted grace, when succored from on high, overcomes, it cannot extirpate corruption. Their old man is indeed crucified, but he still lives. He is dying, 'tis true, but he dies a lingering death; and in struggling for life he will make many violent exertions before he expires. Followers of Jesus, you can easily enter into my meaning. However the apostle's language may have puzzled speculative men who decided concerning their own hearts, you comprehend him without difficulty when he says, *I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin and death which is in my members.* You know the truth of that humiliating declaration, *The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* You know what it is to groan under the workings of pride, ingratitude, insensibility, impurity, unbelief, and all the other evil affections which are expressed by the term of *indwelling sin.* You know that there is in your souls, notwithstanding all the goodness and all the love of your Redeemer, such a propensity to depart from the living God, that were not the everlasting arms continually underneath you, your feet would soon slide into the paths, would sink in the mire, of the grossest sin. Distressing situation! To be surrounded with foes thirsting for our blood is

painful enough; but to harbor in our own bosoms traitors who are leagued with these foes, is beyond measure afflicting. How sweetly and serenely would the Christian's days glide on, were it not for the power of inward corruptions. These are the combustible materials which the fiery darts of the devil kindle into a blaze. Since the fall, none except our blessed Lord was ever without them. Him, it is true, Satan tempted, and the world allured. But the world allured, and Satan tempted, in vain. Happily for us, he could say, *the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me.*

After the view which we have taken of the Christian's danger, one who has never tasted the consolations of the gospel will be ready to ask, "Where then is the blessedness of which you speak? If such are the enemies, such the snares, such the sorrows, of those who are traveling to Zion, what do you mean by telling us, that wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace?" This objection will be fully obviated when we come to consider the other parts of our subject in a subsequent discourse. In the mean time your attention is called to the practical improvement of the doctrine which has been exhibited.

1. Are the powers of darkness, the world, and the natural principles of the heart, combined to oppose the Christian's growth in grace, and pre-

vent his arrival at heaven? Let us hence learn the *vileness of sin.* Obedience to the law, and resemblance to God, are at once the happiness and the glory of rational creatures. All created intelligences came from the hand of God, shining in beauty, and perfect in bliss. Love to their kind benefactor was their highest principle, and their love to every thing else was proportioned to the likeness which it bore to their heavenly Father. This is still their duty, and would be their temper, had there not been a dreadful revolution in the moral world. How inexpressibly hateful must that be which is diametrically opposite to holiness, and justice, and goodness, and truth, and every perfection of Deity! How inexpressibly hateful must that be, which prompts a reasonable being to cherish malignity against the God in whom he lives, and moves, and breathes! How can one show greater malignity against a parent, than by venting spite against his children for his sake? How can one give a more pointed proof of enmity against God than by tormenting his ransomed ones? It is because they resemble him, that men and devils view them with a malicious eye: and the more they resemble him, the more furiously will the malice of their enemies be exerted. Now what has introduced this horrible confusion? What has thus defaced the beauty of God's creation?

What has reversed the lovely order which originally prevailed? It is nothing but *sin!* And shall we think it a trifle? *O do not that abominable thing which I hate*, says Jehovah: and shall any of us indulge ourselves in the commission of it? Ye *who make a mock of sin*, pause, reflect, tremble! It made the devil; it kindled hell; and unless your opinion respecting it be essentially altered, it will plunge you into that lake of fire, and keep you there forever.

2. Let us remark the plain manner in which God deals with men. He calls us to his service, but tells us at the same time, that he calls us to suffering. *If any man*, says the Savior, *if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.* He promises to his faithful followers a rich inheritance in the heavenly Canaan: he promises them also supplies of grace from his abundant fullness to maintain them while they are here: but he informs them likewise that the path to glory lies through difficulty and danger. He holds up to their hope an unfading crown; but he lets them know that it is the crown of victory, and therefore that they must fight for it. Whatever then be the hardships which distress them, they cannot reproach their Lord with deceiving them. Ere they advance a step towards the New Jerusalem, he shows them without disguise what

they must expect, and thus addresses them: *Behold! I have told you before!* Far different is the manner in which the devil treats his servants. He promises them pleasure and profit, but says not that he neither intends nor is able to perform his word: nor that Almighty God may blast in a moment their most flattering prospects. He presents the rose, but he covers the thorn—he strews their way with flowers, but never hints that it leads to the bottomless pit. Deluded men! who listen to his suggestions. Recollect that he is the father of lies. Recollect that these sinful pleasures which you may enjoy for a season, will not, cannot,co mpensate for everlasting burnings. Fly to the Captain of salvation, and you shall be safe.

3. Learn the value of the Christian's inheritance. God does not sport with his people: surely then, it must be a glorious reward which awaits them beyond the grave, when their God, who loves them with more than a father's tenderness, thinks it a sufficient recompense for all their trials. Were it not unspeakably great, and infinitely desirable, it would not be worth so much sorrow and suffering. O ye careless ones, who neglect Jesus and the benefits of his purchase, stand still, and ask yourselves, Is there not a reality in religion? May not the scripture be true in declaring that *it shall be well with the*

righteous, and ill with the wicked? Indeed the question merits your most serious attention. An immortal soul is the depending stake: an error here ruins you eternally.

4. Learn the necessity of watchfulness, and the danger of sporting with temptation. Is all your vigilance sometimes too little to guard you against the wiles of your enemies, and all your strength too feeble to secure you against their power? How then will you stand when you neither watch nor fight? A slothful Christian is a sentinel sleeping on his post! A slothful Christian is a mariner slumbering in a storm! A slothful Christian is a sheep composing itself to rest in the sight of hungry wolves! But what shall we say of those who, besides being negligent, throw themselves into the way of their adversaries? *Avoid all appearance of evil,* is the divine command. But if they will disobey, they must abide the consequences. If they will take coals in their bosoms, they must expect to be burnt! If they will stray into the enemy's ground, they must expect to be caught! If they will run into the mouth of the lion, they must expect to be worried: and no thanks to them that he does not worry them to death: thanks to the great Shepherd who gives *to all his sheep eternal life, so that they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand.* Chris-

tians, watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. *Put on the whole armor of God. Quit yourselves like men: be strong.* But while you are thus active and cautious, remember,

Finally, the insufficiency of your own strength.

What are the weapons of your warfare? Do you intrench yourselves behind your good frame? Alas! one puff of temptation will blow away this ideal refuge. Do you trust to your own firmness? Satan laughs at the shaking of this pointless spear. To leave Satan out of the question, what are your resolutions when opposed to inward depravity? Mere chaff before the whirlwind. He is a raw Christian who is not sensible of this. No! believers! you must neither lean to your own understanding, nor confide in your own ability. You must *be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.* You must *run with patience the race set before you, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.* His grace alone is sufficient for you. With his heaven in your eye, and his word in your hearts, go up *from the wilderness, leaning upon your Beloved.*

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

SERMON III.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

1 TIM. VI. 12.

Fight the good fight of faith.

When men engage in any arduous enterprise, we naturally conclude that they have in view some object, which, upon plausible grounds, they deem an equivalent for their labor and self-denial. To renounce our ease and comfort—to plunge into difficulty—cheerfully to endure fatigue of body and anxiety of mind—to submit to varied suffering without the prospect of remuneration of any kind—is conduct from which nature shrinks; is a sacrifice which neither reason nor religion requires us to make. Not less

ignorant than malicious are the calumnies which many think themselves entitled to heap upon the religion of Jesus, because it enjoins mortification to the world—that is, the corrupt world—and assures the Christian that he must maintain with his foes, while on earth, a painful and perpetual conflict. How preposterous is the judgment of carnal men! They contemplate with blind admiration the warrior, who, impelled by a passion for military glory, or fired by the enthusiasm of freedom, rushes to the field of blood, courts the post of danger, and, in the grim face of death, shakes his martial steel. What does he hope to gain by these heroic exertions? His ambition centres perhaps in the plume of victory. He sighs for fame—"a fancied life in others' breath" —the empty plaudits of a fickle multitude. Or should he fall, his high reward is to have his name enrolled in the historian's volume, and his memory embalmed with the eulogies of the brave. Give him his due—call his passion noble if you please—recapitulate his services—celebrate his achievements—and hold up his example to animate the rising patriot. But here we must stop. Pause—remember that these objects, for the attainment of which the shout of acclamation rends the air, are confined to this world—remember that these coveted glories are fading, fleeting, momentary—not one of them can pass

the verge of time—not one of them can cross the threshold of that dark house appropriated for all the living—no respect is paid to them beyond the grave; and, oh! how killing the thought, that the man who has won the applause of his fellow-men may have lost his own soul, and be excluded forever from the kingdoms of God! Shall we then lavish praises on a son of earth who sheathes his sword in a mortal cause; and shall we dart the glance of scorn on the Christian soldier who fights for the crown of immortal life? Shall we extol the valor of him who coolly meets a man like himself; and shall we despise as a coward him who faces undaunted not only earth but hell? Shall we say that any earthly foe is to be named in comparison with those enemies against whom the Christian wages war? For you will recollect, that in the last discourse on this subject we showed that the powers of darkness who constantly oppose him are strong—are numerous—are malicious—are skillful—are indefatigable. We saw that the men of the world are his uniform and decided foes. We saw that the riches and honors of the world have a dangerous tendency to warp his judgment and pervert his heart, and that the pleasures of the world spread on every side their fatal snares. We saw finally that his own cor-

ruptions often rage with violence and reduce him to great extremities.

To encounter such a terrible combination of adversaries not only demands more than human boldness, but demands also great encouragement; but here the Christian is not left destitute. His Lord not only requires them, as we saw in the first place, to fight, but,

II. From the advantages which this warfare has over all others, it is termed with peculiar propriety a *good* fight. And why may the Christian be said to *fight a good fight?* The answer is obvious—he fights in a good cause—he fights upon good support—he fights in good company—and shall be infallibly victorious.

1. He fights in a good cause—the cause of God.

Sin made sad divisions in the family of heaven. It rent from the honor and bliss of the divine presence, and from every hope of pardon, those sons of pride who rose in rebellion against their Creator. The iniquity of every succeeding day has widened the breach between the persevering and apostate angels, and multiplied the grounds of Jehovah's quarrel. It is both our shame and our misery that we so basely forget the duty which we owe to our Benefactor, as to desert his laws, to league ourselves with hell, and become a party in those plots of wickedness in which

the fiends of darkness are ever busy. Can any thing be more degrading and reproachful than to lift up our heel against the God *who fed us all our lives long?* Can there be a more vile prostitution of our souls, our bodies, and all the blessings which mark our lot, than to employ them as materials and instruments in abetting the devil to carry on his works of treachery? Yet this, this is the hateful character, this the devilish pursuit, of all whose hearts are not renewed by the spirit of Christ. And shall not the Christian exult that divine grace has opened his eyes to see the filthy drudgery of his former life, and enabled him to abandon the cause and camp of Satan, to renew his allegiance to his rightful Lord, and thankfully to take up his station behind Emmanuel's banner? In rectitude there is something which gives a divine firmness to resolution—which smooths the rough features of difficulty—and even in the midst of danger sheds through the untrembling soul a heavenly calm. If, therefore, to be engaged on the side of all that is honorable and glorious—if to be engaged on the side of truth, and righteousness, and purity, and faithfulness, and love, and all the excellencies which constitute the happiness of Jehovah himself, can alleviate suffering, can originate comfort, can repay self-denial, the Christian's warfare has an unrivaled title to be

called a *good* fight. And the title will shine, if possible, more fair, when we consider not only that he fights in a good cause, but,

2. That he fights upon good support.

By support I mean the promises of the covenant, the supplies of grace, and all that rich variety of wisdom which our spiritual Joshua has made for the wants of his church. The wisdom of our leader, the affection of our brother, neither requires nor permits us to war upon our own charges. Great is the variety of trouble which we must encounter in our march, but it is not greater than the variety of comfort. In this Bible, this magazine of our military stores, there is every thing necessary for our laborious expedition. To fit us for resisting and defeating the foes who always hover about us, here is the *whole armor of God.* Here is the *girdle of truth* to *strengthen* our loins. Here is the *breastplate of iron* to cover our hearts. Here is the *preparation of the gospel of peace* to secure our feet from burning sands, and the thorns and spikes which our adversaries may plant in our path. Here is faith's impenetrable *shield to receive and extinguish the fiery darts of the wicked.* Here is the *helmet of salvation* to defend our heads, and here the *sword of the Spirit*, whose divinely-tempered edge not all the host of hell could ever withstand. When we are obliged to pass, though

shrouded in darkness, between the craggy precipice and the wily snare, here is the torch of celestial fire to show us at once our danger and escape. It is this lamp of heaven which David tells us was *a light to his feet.* When worn out with fatigue, here is *the water of life* to recruit our spirits. Here is the food with which our Redeemer covers our table in the wilderness—food of every kind, from milk to strong meat, suited to all ages and all degrees of strength, and set before us in all the vast profusion which a God can furnish. The weary traveler who has passed through an inhospitable wild, and is exhausted by the scorching sun, does not more relish the cool refreshing stream, the fragrance of the opening flower, or the luxuriant fruit, than does the Christian that divine repast which his Lord has prepared for him. None but they who have been filled with the fatness of God's house can conceive the rapture of the believer's soul when his faith is enabled to grasp the promises of the covenant, and to press from them their unutterable sweetness. It is when the great Dispenser of new covenant bliss *satisfieth their mouths with good things* that *their youth is renewed like the eagle's.* When he makes them *sit down under his shadow with great delight*—when his fruit is sweet to their taste—when his Holy Spirit descends in the dew of his sacred

influences, and gladdens their dejected hearts—these moments of love, these droppings of his myrrh, repay a thousandfold their sorrow and their suffering. This indeed is not their common privilege. They *walk by faith and not by sight*, and therefore their brethren, who dare not lay claim to such distinguished honor, and whose trembling knees totter while they follow in the footsteps of the flock, should not be discouraged. Christ looks with peculiar tenderness upon these lambs; and if in sovereignty he does not think proper to feast them so highly as others, yet he holds around them his almighty arm, and keeps from them the roaring lion and the ravenous wolf. He puts them into his bosom, and carries them, they know not how, through difficulty and danger, sets them in a plain path, and enables them to run with cheerfulness the way of his commandments. Nor let those stronger disciples, whom the King has dignified with peculiar marks of his favor, indulge a slothful temper. It is after these seasons of joy that they may look for some of the rudest attacks of their enemies. The combat is still before them, and many a terrible wound may they receive ere it be ended. But shrink not, O Christian! shrink not from the conflict; wounded you may be, but not mortally. No blow can be so fatal as to be incurable by the balm of Gilead. The great

Physician of souls, whose judgment never errs, whose skill never fails, hastes to the relief of his people, pours into their painful wounds his sovereign balsam, and not only applies but blesses his own prescription. Thus we see that the believer's hardest trials are softened with a consolation and a joy with which a stranger to his life can never intermeddle. There is not within these walls a child of God, (and I hope there are a goodly number,) who will not join issue in the bold assertion. Try the experiment if you please. Watch the Christian in his most afflicted hours. When, beset with his spiritual enemies, his agonizing soul is almost overwhelmed, ask him, in this moment of anguish, to part with his Redeemer—promise, as the reward of compliance, all the sensual delights that can enter into a voluptuary's heaven. Know, vain man, that he would spurn thy most splendid offer—he would cleave more closely to the cross, and tread thy baubles in the dirt; and indeed it cannot be otherwise, for the circumstances of the Christian and the carnal man are exactly the reverse of each other. In few of the wicked is the cry of conscience so completely stifled as not to fill the soul occasionally with serious alarm. The hopelessness of the sinner's cause cannot but imbitter his joy, and give to all his griefs their most corroding venom; whilst the enjoy-

ment of the Christian, cheered with the goodness of his cause, carry with them an unutterable relish, and soften all the pains of his pilgrimage. Surely, then, he has every reason to pity those who affect to pity him, and to triumph in the reflection that he fights so good a fight.

But 3. The Christian fights a good fight, because he fights in good company.

Agreeable society prevents despondence, lightens toil, and inspires courage. Let the believer then look around him, and see how many excellent ones of the earth, even in this day of coldness when multitudes have left their first love, are seeking with him *a better country, a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* Let faith's keen eye glance over the field of action, and view the bright, the numerous bands that appear on the Lord's side. View them, believer, pressing towards *the mark, the prize of their high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* View them, and refrain, if thou canst, from congratulating thyself at being enrolled in the list, and sharing the labors of the blissful throng. View them, and say, does not a holy emulation burn in thy bosom? Does not the animating sight impart fresh vigor, and stimulate thee to strain every nerve in order to keep pace with those soldiers of Christ? But these are not your only companions: the angels of God

are never absent. *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them who shall be the heirs of salvation?* This has been their delightful employment from the commencement of the gospel to the present hour. It is true, they do not now as in former times, visibly interfere for the people of God, but their agency is not the less real nor effectual. It is as much a promise of the covenant as any other: *He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, to keep thee in all thy ways; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.* From a thousand evils which we never suspect, do these heavenly friends protect our souls. About thee, O Christian, these armies of heaven have many conflicts with the hosts of hell—conflicts which thou never shalt know till thy warfare be ended, and the hallelujahs of eternal victory fill the temple above. What a thought is this? That Jehovah should dispatch, to support our faltering steps, the shining messengers of his will! and let the grateful soul swell with emotions too big for utterance, when we reflect that not only the angels, but the Lord of angels, the Angel of the covenant, is at our side. Those lips which knew no guile, have said, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.* This is the marrow of our consolation. Who shall vie in dignity with the favored ones that walk

in company with Jehovah-Jesus? Who shall harm the child of blessing that marches towards Zion with his arm locked in the arm of his Redeeming God? Ye glittering toys of earth, where is your brightness, where your worth, when ye come in competition with an honor and a happiness like this? Let these glow-worms of the night sink into their native obscurity, when the Sun of Righteousness beams around us the splendors of his glory. Triumph, believer, in the grace and goodness of your Lord. And ye who have no interest in his salvation, take care how ye meddle with these beloved Jacobs. In unchanging faithfulness, God has drawn around his chosen, a sacred circle. Stand back, thou profane! Touch not, with an unhallowed hand, these monuments of mercy. It is the command of him, whose frown is worse than hell, *Do my prophets no harm;* and all his saints are as dear to him as his prophets; he *who touches them, touches the apple of his eye.* Indignant thunders murmur over your heads, and the vengeful lightning is impatient to chastise your temerity. Who then dare say that the Christian does not fight a good fight? What will the scorner have to reply, when to the precious privileges that have been already mentioned, we add,

4. That the believer fights a good fight, because victory is sure.

There is not, my believing friends, a promise in the whole Bible, (and it is full of promises) which does not belong to you. There is not in the Bible a promise which does not, either directly or indirectly, insure to you strength to overcome your enemies. Many of them are express to this very purpose: what words are these? *No weapon formed against thee shall prosper. Thy enemies shall all be found liars unto thee.* What though they tell you that the difficulties in the way are insurmountable? You have nothing to do with difficulties: your inquiry is, What saith the Lord? Your reply must be, *Get thee behind me, Satan!* The God who hath commanded, will support: the God who hath promised, will perform. I know I am unable of myself to emerge from my trouble; but I know also that the *Lord will provide.* He hath said, *Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee by the right hand of my righteousness.* Are not these promises sealed with the blood of your Redeemer? And who dares question his veracity? Is it not he who *is a liar, and the father of lies?* Is not the arm of Omnipotence bared to execute what immutable truth engaged? And who are these spiritual Philis-

tines that defy not the armies, but the Son, of the living God? Are they not the creatures of his hand? Did he not foil them on the cross? Did he not, at his resurrection and ascension, chain them as captives to his chariot-wheels, and make a show of them openly? And shall they be too strong for him now when he is *set down at the right hand of the majesty on high?* Absurd idea! Face, then, the fiercest of your foes, and let this be your song of battle, *In the name of our God we will set up our banners.* But while you rejoice in the advantages of your Lord's service, see that you keep things in their proper connection: break not that harmony which he has established: and to preserve this harmony, you will find it of high moment to be under the practical influence of the principle inculcated in the

III. Part of our subject, which assures us that the Christian's warfare is not only a *good* fight, but the good fight of *faith.*

It is this important grace which gives life and vigor to all the rest. Not that it has any merit in itself; but it is the instrument by which the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of redemption. It is faith which keeps us close to Christ, and receives continually supplies from his fulness—and what cannot this faith effect? What difficulties can she not endure? What temptation

not trample under foot? What corruption not subdue? Look over the long list of worthies whose names shine in the annals of redemption, and see what faith *has* done. As she has the same object, and the same support, she has done nothing but what she can yet do. She is as able as ever to *stop the mouths of lions—to quench the violence of fire—to escape the edge of the sword—to make you valiant in fight—to turn to flight the armies of the aliens*, and to perform all those other deeds of wonder, which few, very few amongst us, would think of imitating. Ye faint-hearted Christians, why do ye stare astonishment when ye read the achievements of Old Testament saints? These were men—you are but dwarfs—in the divine life. Blush that they outstripped you so far. Look up to the cloud of witnesses who bore testimony to the faithfulness of a promising God, and who have now *received the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.* Set their example before you, and *go ye and do likewise.* In marching to the battle, let faith lead the other graces, while she follows the Redeemer, and thus tread in the *footsteps of them who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises.*

In improving the subject on which our thoughts have been employed, let me exhort believers to be of good courage. Arduous is

the work, but glorious is the cause, and unspeakably great the encouragement. And when you equip yourselves for the combat, see that every part of your armor, from your helmet to your sandals, be instamped with the name of Christ. No weapon which does not come from his armory, and bear the impress of his name, will in the least intimidate your daring foes. It is this name (for they well remember it since the defeat of Calvary) it is this name which strikes dismay into their hearts, and confusion into their ranks. And to banish every fear, be careful to recollect that you fight not only in the name, but under the eye, and with the aid, of your Lord. Young Christian, here is encouragement for you. You have just put on the harness of your celestial warfare. You are just beginning a career of glory in which you may lay your account with meeting opposition the most determined and unremitted. You are in that stage of your life in which your own corruptions are most powerful and active—in which the allurements of a depraved world are most fascinating—in which the smiles and the frowns of men most deeply affect the mind. You, above all others, are marked out to feel the malice of wicked men, and of those evil spirits by whom they are governed. But fear not, you fight under an invincible Leader. Jesus, the

author and finisher of your faith—Jesus, who has all power in heaven, in earth, and in hell too, goes before you. He lifts above the necks of them who hate you, his glittering sword, which shivers all hostile armor, and mows down the thickest ranks of his and your enemies. Be assured he will strike the blow of your deliverance at the very moment when you most need it. Gird up, then, the loins of your faith. *Run with patience the race set before you.* Look constantly unto Jesus—for though you can do nothing of yourself, yet *through Christ strengthening you, you can do all things.* Remember that his faithfulness is pledged to bear you through. *He will perfect that which concerneth you.* He will make you not only a conqueror, but *more* than a conqueror; and when your warfare is finished, he will receive you to himself; his own hand shall twine about your brows the wreath of victory, and it shall bloom forever in all the glories of Paradise.

Old Christian, here is encouragement for you. Since you gave your heart to the Redeemer you have had many a bitter hour, and endured many a terrible conflict for his sake. But sure I am that you do not repent your choice. All your afflictions have been amply compensated by his love and his presence. He promised you at first that he would dwell in you, and walk in you, and walk round you, and be your God. Has he not

been as good as his word? Is it not because you have obtained help of him that you continue to this day? And will he forsake you now? He will not, he cannot. If he was the God of your youth, he will be the God of your declining years. He has said even to *old age, I am he; and even to hoar hairs, I will carry you.* How comforting the thought that when your heart and your flesh fail, *this God is the strength of your heart and your portion forever.* Courage, then, old friend! A few more sighs, a few more sorrows, a few more sufferings, and all shall be well forever. *Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed;* now are you approaching the borders of your promised inheritance. Lift up your eyes and view the heavenly Canaan. 'Tis true you cannot enter till you have passed through the swellings of Jordan, but your Lord hath promised, when thou *passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee.* 'Tis true you must grapple with the "king of terrors." Hastily he advances upon you. But startle not at his grisly appearance. It is the mimicry of danger —the mock terror of an enfeebled, a harmless foe. It is, too, your concluding struggle, *for the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.* When you have vanquished this enemy, (and vanquish him you shall,) you will understand, far better than you can now, the meaning of these tri-

umphant words, *The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.*

To them who are unacquainted with the Christian's life I have nothing to say. You, my brethren, are fighting; but did you ever take the pains to ask yourselves, in what cause? A cause beyond description degrading and hopeless. You are fighting with the devil and for the devil and against the God of your mercies, and against your own happiness. You are treasuring up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and if you are resolved to remain on the devil's side, you must share at last the devil's fate. You are engaged against infinite odds; there is not any hope that you shall succeed. It is a dreadful thing to *fall into the hands of the living God;* and if he spared not the angels that sinned, he certainly will not spare you. We invite you to a warfare better in itself and better in its end. Come, cast in your lot with us, and *fight the good fight of faith.* Besides the consolation of a righteous cause and divine support, you will have the best of company. The saints will be your friends, angels will be your friends, a triune God will be your friend, heaven will be your eternal home, and a crown of life your rich reward.

NATURE AND NECESSITY OF REGENERATION.

SERMON IV.

NATURE AND NECESSITY OF REGENERATION.

JOHN III. 5.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

In the preceding part of the chapter, our Lord had inculcated upon Nicodemus the absolute necessity of a *new birth*, in order to a sinful man's even perceiving the kingdom of God. The candid Pharisee, to whom such a doctrine appeared as uncouth, incredible, and absurd, as it does at this day to many who call themselves enlightened Christians, expressed his astonishment, as if the Redeemer had uttered a physical contradiction: *How can a man be born when he is*

OLD? *can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?* Without stopping to notice the grossness of his conceptions, our Lord Jesus, with the majesty of *a teacher sent from God*, repeats his assertion, with a slight variation in the form, which might lead Nicodemus to some general idea of his meaning: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of* WATER *and of the* SPIRIT, *he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

The "kingdom of God," means that gracious establishment in our world, of which he is the author; which derives all its principles and efficiency from him, of which the design is to destroy the works of the devil, and bring back, with increased beauty, the order originally set up; in a word, to make such a display of his righteousness, truth, grace, and love, in and towards our rebel world, as should command the admiration of all holy beings, and be an eternal exhibition, in all places of his dominion, of the perfection of his government.

This "kingdom of God," so stupendous in its effects, is yet so pure and spiritual in its process, as to be invisible not merely to eyes of flesh and blood, but even to the eyes of intellect in corrupted man, until they have undergone a renovation, and have received a power suited to the nature of the objects which they are called to

contemplate. *Except a man be born again, he cannot* SEE *the kingdom of God.*

If such a change is necessary to just perceptions of that kingdom, how much more clearly is it necessary to become its subject, to enjoy its privileges, and share in its rewards! So necessary, lay it well to your hearts, that the eternal truth has pronounced, *Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit,* i. e. of the purifying Spirit, *he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

As the doctrine is laid down from the lips of Jesus himself, it is an individual concern, and should strike us with a sacred horror, lest after all our professions of the truth, our standing in the house of God, and our hopes of heaven, we should be found destitute of that qualification without which he has declared that not a man of us shall enter into the kingdom of God.

Let us then, as we do not wish to deceive our own souls, and sink down to hell in the full sight of heaven, investigate more narrowly what it is to be born again, and whence the indisputable necessity arises to enter into the kingdom of God.

When a human being is born, he is introduced into a world of which it is not possible he should have any previous conception. He exists by a new medium, and by new means. His growth proceeds in a new manner—his faculties expe-

rience a new development—he acquires new relations and tastes, relishes, preferences, pleasures, pursuits, adapted to and growing out of his new state of existence. *Old things*, literally, *are passed away, and all things are become new.* Were he remanded back to his first mode of life, he would immediately expire, because it contains no provision for the perpetuity of that life which belongs to his new and improved state.

In natural things all this is undeniable; and as our Lord has employed the figure of a *birth*, by calling it a being *born again*, to shadow forth that change which passes upon a sinner when he "enters into the kingdom of God," there must be a resemblance between them. The figure must correspond, in its essential points, with the thing figured; or it is no illustration of the subject. The natural must represent the spiritual birth. The entrance into this world by being born, an entrance into the kingdom of God by being born again, or our Lord's solemn and impressive language, gives us no assistance in forming any just ideas of the change which he asserts to be necessary. We may, therefore, without pushing the analogy of natural and spiritual things to an indiscreet length, safely maintain that our Lord holds up an introduction into the kingdom of God as an entrance upon a new state of being, involving a thorough change of

perceptions, feelings, and habits; so that *if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature;* and with him *old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

1. Man, by his new birth, enters into the kingdom of God as a kingdom of *light.*

There is no figure in the scripture more commonly used to depict the difference between our old state of nature and our new one by grace, than the opposition between light and darkness. Christians were *once darkness, but are now light in the Lord. God hath called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. They that follow after Jesus Christ* shall not *walk in darkness,* but *shall have the light of life. The eyes of their understanding being opened, they see wondrous things in God's law,* and see them most clearly where they least expected to find them. They see *the light of the knowledge of God shining in the person of Jesus Christ,* and that it cannot possibly shine any where else, to refresh, and console, and invigorate the sinner. They see that Christ Jesus, who was to them not only *without form or comeliness,* but even *a stone of stumbling and rock of offense,* is the perfection of beauty, the *very brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person*—is the *corner-stone, elect, precious, which God hath laid in Zion,* as the sure and only foundation,

upon which, whosoever *believeth, shall not be ashamed.* They see the most divine consistency and excellence in that which was formerly incomprehensible and contradictory to their mind; the union of truth and mercy, of righteousness and peace, of redemption by the blood of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace; so that the just God is the Savior. They see that this way of salvation and no other *became him for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory;* and that it is infinitely impossible they should be deceived in trusting it. *I know*, says an assured believer, *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against* THAT DAY. They see that sin is folly, and the wages of sin death—that the cup of sinful gratification, in which they formerly took pleasure, is charged with poison, and was actually working their destruction. They see that wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and her paths the only ones that "lead to glory and to God." They see, in an inverted order and proportion, the things of time and sense, and the things which are eternal—in one word, they see what they never saw before, *the kingdom of God!*

2. When a man enters into the kingdom of God, he exists by *a new medium.*

This new medium is the Spirit of God in his gracious influence. He is universally the *Spirit of life.* In him we live, and move, and have our being. All the created life in the universe is from him. But he dispenses it agreeably to the nature of the constitution under which he acts. The vegetable, animal, and intellectual worlds have their lives such as the Spirit of God gives them for the purposes they are intended to answer. It is no otherwise in the world of grace, the kingdom of God. There too *it is the Spirit that quickeneth, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* He bestows and maintains a life answerable to the part which the saved sinner has to perform, the affections he is to cherish, the blessedness he is to enjoy, the glory which awaits him. As one who is made alive unto God, not a faculty of the new man is unfolded, not a function exercised, not a motion performed, but by the Spirit of God. His very faith, the elementary principle of his life, is from the Holy Spirit; so that *he lives by the Spirit, he walks by the Spirit, he is led by the Spirit.* By the Spirit the Christian mortifies the deeds of the body; he brings forth fruit unto God; he cultivates his love, enjoys his fellowship, is *spiritually minded.* All this is manifestly a *new* life, infinitely removed from any merely intellectual attainment, however refined or exalted. A life for which

earth has no atmosphere, and which can exist nowhere but *in the kingdom of God.*

3. He who is born again lives by new *means.*

These are the word, the ordinances, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. No sooner is the babe of grace born into the kingdom of God, than he cries for *the sincere milk of the word.* The speculations of men and their discoveries, even of truth, however elegant or lofty, are at best but "dry breasts;" they afford no nutriment to his soul, nor can satisfy the cravings of his appetite; and in every after stage of his existence, it is the bread of God which came down from heaven—it is the meat which endureth to everlasting life—that can either fulfill his desires, or refresh and invigorate his frame. Then the word of God is found of him and he eats it, and it is unto him *the joy and the rejoicing of his heart.* The *judgments of the Lord are*, to his taste, *sweeter than the honey and the honey-comb.* In the ordinances of Christ he finds those green pastures and those gently flowing waters which delighted the psalmist and equally delight him. These ordinances are thus precious and powerful because they are channels through which the Redeemer's grace pours into his heart. Christ himself is his life. *His flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed.* His words are verified in a believer's experience. *He that*

eateth me, even he shall live by me. So that the life which he now lives in the flesh is by the faith of the Son of God. Thus fed and nourished, and filled with the fullness of God, he *grows in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*, until that which is perfect is come, and he is admitted into his presence with exceeding joy.

4. In consequence of his *new birth*, his faculties acquire a new development.

The eyes of his understanding are enlightened, so that he perceives what is *the hope of the calling of God, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.* As a *natural man he received not the things of the Spirit of God, because they were foolishness unto him.* But being *born of the Spirit*, he has *spiritual discernment*, so that what things were *foolishness* to him appear to be *the wisdom of God*, and *the power of God to his salvation.*

His will, which before was all enmity, is now made pliant and ductile to the will of God. It is the rule and reason of his duties and of his submission. Show a Christian that what he is called to do or to endure is agreeable to the will of his heavenly Father, and you do infinitely more to nerve his resolution or to calm his spirit—to render him courageous, inflexible, persevering, or to soften and subdue his soul—to re-

press every rising murmur and bend his mind into meek and cordial acquiescence—than by a thousand arguments drawn from the necessity of the case, from the dignity of virtue, from the fitness of things, from the good of the universe, or any of those sterile topics which ignorance addresses to vanity. It is the will of God! forms a short summary of a regenerated man's ethics, and disposes of all the objections of flesh and blood, and sinful appetite, and earthly decencies, interests, and passions, with a celerity somewhat proportioned to the majesty of Him who has spoken. In short, *to do the will of God from the heart* is the perfection after which the new man habitually aspires.

The *affections* also undergo a renovation. Once they were *set on things on the earth;* the love of this present world occupied and filled their hearts with *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.* But being born again, they are taught *to set their affections on things above, where Jesus Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.* Disregard and despise the good gifts of God's providence they do not, they cannot. They are the only people on earth who know how to assign them their proper places; to use them according to the intention of the blessed Giver, and to be unfeignedly thankful for them. Gratitude to God is a conspicuous fea-

ture on the face of the new man; it forms a family likeness, by which the members are identified. *Be ye thankful* is a precept which none but a Christian obeys. But when the question is concerning their supreme and ultimate preference, the soul of a believer fastens upon other objects, and he values the things of this transitory life, whatever they be, quite as low as, when viewed in their proper relations of the gift of God, he values them highly. *What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.* The principle of *love*, which has its perfect reign in the kingdom of God, and binds together the society of holy beings, is *shed abroad in his heart.* He loves the Lord Jesus, the Redeemer, tenderly, intensely, fervently. He joins, without a qualification, in that sacred curse of the apostle, *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha.* He loves the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the original fountain of all saving mercies, and can from his inmost soul re-echo that benediction of Peter, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who of his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* He loves that Holy Spirit, the Comforter,

the Advocate, who comes as the representative of the risen Savior, to dwell in them, to abide with them forever, as the Spirit of holiness, as the Spirit of grace and supplication, to make the petitions of their breast a counterpart of the intercessions within the vail. An argument drawn from *the love of the Spirit* touches every spring of ingenuous emotion within him. How can he but love, with his purest affections, that gracious Friend, who was deputed by his glorified Lord to woo him and win him to blessedness and God; to take possession of him in the Conqueror's name; to put the seal of heaven upon his forehead; to subdue and finally to slay all the enemies of his own peace and of his Master's glory, and in the mean time as *the Holy Spirit of promise*, to be in him *the earnest of the purchased possession*, and to *seal him up until the day of redemption.*

Finally, he loves the children of God. *By this we know that we love God, when we love the children of God. Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him that is begotten of him.* Formerly they were no more to him than kindred, business, or the common offices of humanity made them. Now there is a feeling of brotherhood, a community of interests and instincts. He has a fellowship with them which is founded upon their *fellowship with the Father*

and with his Son Jesus Christ. All the children of God are like him. They are *renewed* after his image; and one of the first effects of the Holy Spirit's agency is to draw the lines of that image deep and indelible. It has tints which speak the beauty and coloring of the skies. It is accompanied with the rudiments of that language which sounds barbarian in uncircumcised ears, but which is common and peculiar to renewed men, and is spoken perfectly and alone at the court of the great King. *Their speech bewrayeth them*, and marks a dignity, for which, were it possible, the monarchs of the world would do well and wisely to barter their crowns and kingdoms. They may be obscure and contemptible to outward view. Lazarus lies at your palace-door, perhaps, hated and disregarded. But he has a life-guard of a celestial Prince. Ministering spirits are in attendance, and wait for the signal to convey him away to the regions of light. You may perhaps see him there one day, when a drop of water to cool your tongue will be of more value to you than all that earthly grandeur which now pampers pride, and, it may be, shuts you out from the kingdom of God. But that *love of the brethren*, of which I speak, depends not upon external things. It looks to the image of God, which can send forth the rays of its glory through the

poverty, and meanness, and misery, of earthly things. It is not ashamed of those rags of which God himself is not ashamed, and which comport with a heavenly inheritance. O ye, who bear the image of the heavenly as ye have borne that of the earthly Adam, whatever be your condition here, I will call you my brothers, my sisters, by a dearer tie than ever bound flesh and blood together—the tie of the Savior's grace, of which the whole beauty and strength shall be reserved for our rapturous discovery in the kingdom of our Father!

Lastly, The regenerated sinner has new relations and tastes, preferences, pleasures, and pursuits, adapted to and growing out of his new state of existence.

1. He has new *relations.*

To God the Father. In his natural state, his relations were those of a rebellious creature under sentence of death. Now he is *reconciled to God by the death of his Son.* The sentence which was passed against him is reversed, and he stands adjudged to life, by a sentence which there is no power in the universe to cancel. *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth!* His relations as a rebel are replaced by those of a dear child, and God is become to him a gracious and loving Father.

To God the Son, who has redeemed him by his blood and subdued him by his grace to the obedience of the faith. He is accepted in the Beloved, who makes intercession for him; who is gone up on high to prepare a place for him, and shall show him, at last, among that ransomed family, of which he shines in the honors of the first born.

To God the Holy Ghost. No longer to him the Spirit of the curse but of blessings manifold, who is now his companion, his guide, his protector—who shows him the path of life, and will be with him to the end, crowning him with ultimate and complete victory over all adversaries, and introducing him at last into the presence of the blessed One with exceeding joy.

To the divine law. Armed no longer with destructive penalty, but commissioned to be his preceptor, to guide his feet into the way of peace, that his path, being the path of the just, shall shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

To the providence of God, which shall permit no ill to befall him—nothing which shall endanger his substantial interests—nothing which shall not promote his sanctification—working an increase of grace—producing the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and causing all things to co-operate for his final and perfect good.

To the holy angels, with whom he is united into a new family under Christ the Head, who love him for the sake of his Elder Brother, and always behold the face of his Father in heaven, waiting to do him good, and glad to be employed at his command in acts of kindness to him as the heir of salvation.

2. Regenerated men have new tastes, preferences, and pleasures. For those things which were once their delight they have lost their relish. *They that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.* They taste that the Lord is gracious. They prefer the company and condition of fellow-heirs. Like Moses, they had *rather suffer affliction with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. The Lord puts gladness into their hearts more than in the time when corn and wine,* the best sensual joys, abound to the men of sin.

3. Regenerated men have entirely new pursuits.

Like other Gentiles they once walked in the vanity of their minds—committing iniquity with greediness—minding only the things of time and sense—neglecting, despising, hating whatsoever looked farther than the sphere of their purblind vision, and aimed at an inheritance beyond the

grave. Now that their eyes are opened, and their hearts changed, they cast their glance back with shame and horror, upon the practices and the perdition they have escaped.

God hath called them into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ, and they *no longer run to the same excess of riot. They have chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from them.* They have cast in their lot with the strangers and pilgrims, who, though *in* the world, are not *of* it, but are marching through it to the place of their destination, to the land of the shining ones. *They seek a better country* than earth, even a *heavenly: therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city.* With their eyes fastened on that city—*the peace of God keeping their hearts and minds*—and with the hope of seeing Jesus as he is, strong in their bosoms, they press toward the prize of their high calling, till, every duty fulfilled, every obstacle surmounted, every enemy vanquished, they are welcomed by the shout of the holy ones, into the presence of their Father.

Recollecting and comparing the remarks which have been made on the change, commonly called regeneration, or more scripturally, the "being born again," you may form something like a just idea of those who *enter into the kingdom of God*—in other words, of *true Christians*.

They are brought into a world where they see and discern spiritual objects in a spiritual light. They exist by a new medium—the Spirit of God. Their life is maintained by new means—the divine word and ordinances. Their faculties undergo a new development—understanding, affections, will, all are directed to new and holy things; particularly a sanctified charity, exerting itself in love to God and man, rules in their hearts—and finally, they have new relations, tastes, preferences, pleasures, and pursuits—all marking a complete and radical change in the ruling principles of the soul.

This description of the new man rests not upon human fancy, but on the divine testimony: every part and portion of it being supported by clear scriptural authority, and comes to your consciences with *Thus saith the Lord.* I have not said that every believer is at all times an example of this character, in the whole variety, extent, and power of its graces; nor that he may not fall short, now in one and then in another. But I say that these graces, of their own nature, belong to that new life which the Holy Ghost implants in the new birth—that they are elements which enter into the composition of that new character which is more or less unfolded here, and shall be seen in all its proportions and perfections in the future life—

I say that they all of them belong substantially to every one who *enters the kingdom of God.* That he will study to be a living proof of their presence and prevalence—and that in fact they *are* expanded, *the seed of God* which contains them being gradually developed, in size, strength, and beauty, as the several circumstances of his lot render their proper exercise necessary. We are now to inquire,

II. Into the absolute necessity of such a change before a man can enter into the kingdom of God. It arises,

1. From the divine determination. Without it, says the Redeemer, *he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* Be your religious connections ever so pure—your external privileges ever so great—your outward profession ever so decided—your moral conduct among men ever so exemplary—the question still remains, have you been *born again?* Without this, all other advantages are nothing; all other recommendations are of no avail; *except a man be born,* lay it well to your hearts that there be no fatal mistake, *except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the eternal Truth, has settled this point, beyond the possibility of reconsideration. Never hope that it may be reversed; that it may be revised; that some fa-

vorable judgment may be passed, which shall admit you at last, however unqualified; for, in the

2. Place, this necessity arises from the *very nature of the case.*

For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Now the devil's principal work in our world is the apostasy and corruption of man. It is in the human soul that his abominable triumph is to be seen and felt. There he has effaced the glorious image of his Creator, and has drawn his own hideous likeness in its place. There he has entered in as a foul usurper; he makes the heart the citadel of his rebellion; and marshals under his command all the faculties and affections, to resist the authority of his rightful Sovereign. Can a man thus forsworn to his allegiance, thus allied to the prince of darkness, thus sharing with him in all the tempers and principles of his revolt, can a man thus circumstanced, suppose ye, be admitted into that kingdom which is set up for the annihilation of Satan's power, and supposes a renunciation of his cause, and a desertion of his standard, in every one who joins himself to Messiah the Prince, and becomes a loyal subject of the King of kings? Must not the thieves be expelled, and their den purified by celestial ablution—be

converted into a temple of the living God? Must not the faculties be restored to their original use, and ability imparted to perform the duties and to relish the pleasures of this new and sacred state? And as the kingdom of God here is preparatory to his kingdom hereafter, or rather is but a part of that same dispensation, shall any who are not qualified for the kingdom of glory be acknowledged as the real subjects of his grace? *Shall any thing that defileth or that worketh abomination* find a place, do ye imagine, in the regions of the just? And shall a sinner, laden with guilt, steeped in pollution, his heart filled with enmity against the Holy One, and himself, at best, whatever be his appearance in the eyes of men, but an accomplice in the treasons of the pit, shall such an one find his way into the number of those *whom the Lord knoweth to be his*, and claim his place in the antichamber of the King's palace? The bosom of every sanctified one, of all who shall see the King in his glory, swells with abhorrence. The faces even of those who are yet strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, redden with shame at the impudence of the expectation; and every unseared conscience is appalled at the blasphemy. No, no, the thing is impossible! *Ye* MUST *be born again.* All the principles, affections, tastes, and habits, of your natural state,

must be changed; a revolution, internal, holy, complete, must be effected, or you bid an eternal adieu to *the kingdom of God.* It is a terrifying thought, a fearful utterance to be proclaimed in the ears of professed Christians, yet an utterance of imperious necessity, except ye be thus changed, except ye be washed, justified, sanctified by the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, ye never see his kingdom—not a soul of you.

Allow me then with all plainness and fidelity to press this point, and to ask you who pass in the world as Christians, do you know, from experience, what is this new birth, this transition from death unto life, without which the gates of the kingdom of God are barred against you here, and will be so forever hereafter? Do you know any thing about it? I do not mean what you can *say* about it. There are many who have been well instructed by *man*, on this as on other peculiar doctrines of the gospel, and who can make long, luminous, and eloquent dissertations on their abstract truth; yet never knew their grace, nor felt their power, nor set their foot in the *kingdom of God.* My friends, this is not enough. You may have abundance of intellectual light—as much speculative wisdom as the most distinguished spirit of the pit—you may believe the truths of this Bible upon con-

clusive external evidence—you may be exemplary in your moral deportment toward your fellow-creatures—participate in all the outward privileges of the Christian church—be accounted a believer of high degree before mortal tribunals, and yet the renewing Spirit of God have had nothing to do with you. *The world*, says the beloved John, *knoweth us not.* Is not the Christian character a riddle and a mystery, containing something which you cannot unravel? When he speaks of the blood of Jesus Christ *cleansing the conscience from dead works to serve the living God*—of that *peace which passeth all understanding*—of *setting his affections on things above*—of *looking for the blessed hope, the appearing of the great God our Savior*—does he not speak a foreign language? Are you not sensible there is something here which you do not understand? which has no counterpart in your soul? It is dreadfully ominous. There is every ground to fear that when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, you may prove destitute of the only thing which can entitle or qualify you to enter his heavenly kingdom—all your knowledge, gifts, profession, and privileges notwithstanding.

And is it so indeed? Must we admit the overwhelming thought, that many whom we knew in the flesh, whom we loved for their amiable

properties, whom we hailed as brethren in the common salvation, must at last sink down before our faces in bottomless perdition? Shall any pass from their seats in this sanctuary into that place of despair? O what a sweet relief to the foreboding heart, that still there is *hope!* It has not yet come to the dreaded extremity. O then, what shall we do to be saved? Who utters that agonizing cry? The way is but one, and it is short. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou* SHALT *be saved. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.* There is no peradventure in the case. Thou SHALT be saved. O had I but that precious faith, this unbelief would not weigh me down, like a mill-stone of death. Go to *Jesus, the author and finisher of faith*, who has it to give, and who gives it freely. Go to him with your stony heart, with your death *in trespasses and sins*, and plead with him for the quickening Spirit. Never quit him till you get an answer of peace—throw yourself at his feet, and lie there where sinner never yet perished, till he be gracious unto you. HE hath said, *him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.*

A word to the children of God, and I have done. Beloved, now are we the sons of God. Born of his Spirit, and introduced into his kingdom, *What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness.* Exemplify the

beauties, breathe the tempers, speak the language, cherish the loftiness, of the kingdom. It is not for those who are of such high descent and such infinite expectations, to stoop to those toys which the children of earth mistake for riches, nor to defile themselves with the pollutions which they miscall pleasures. Keep unspotted that white robe in which you were clothed on the day of your new birth, the day of your espousals, and of the gladness of your heart. Know ye that the very angels of God can tell you, as the heirs of the kingdom, only by your *walking as Christ also walked.* It is the light of the divine image shining out in its brightness that renders your names visible in the catalogue of God's elect. Ponder much your obligations to the grace of the Lord Jesus, who loved you with an everlasting love—so loved you as to give *himself* an offering for you. The bitterness of Gethsemane and the anguish of Calvary, the rage of hell and the curse of God, could not shake his loving purpose, nor make him flinch from his resolution to save you. From the sentence of God's righteous law and the danger of eternal death—from the filth and power of your depravity—the service, the communion, and the recompense of the devil—he hath called you to a rank above the angels, and to all the blessedness of the kingdom of God.

Oh! *We will remember thy love more than wine. To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto his God and Father; to him,* with all affections, *be glory and honor, dominion and power, forever and ever, amen!*

WORKS

OF

THE FLESH AND SPIRIT

DISTINGUISHED.

SERMON V.

WORKS OF THE FLESH AND SPIRIT DISTINGUISHED.

JOHN III. 6.

That which is born of the flesh is FLESH; *and that which is born of the Spirit is* SPIRIT.

THE doctrine of the *new birth*, which the prophet of the church has declared to be the original of all spiritual character, and all heavenly hope, and without which he has decided most peremptorily, a man *cannot enter into the kingdom of God*, sounds most uncouth in the ears of corrupted reason. It is so entirely out of the way of human wisdom—it contains a fact so utterly anomalous, or rather so repugnant to the known constitution of either physical or moral

nature, that even *masters in Israel* have pronounced the plain meaning of the terms in which it is proposed to be absurd and fanatical, and have had recourse to a monstrous figure in order to make our Redeemer's language intelligible, and vindicate him from the charge of Puritanism. Men, to whom *the things of the Spirit of God* in their obvious construction are foolishness, love to take refuge in this system of *figuring;* and when they have so strained and altered the phraseology of the Bible as not to leave standing a syllable which savors of its sense, or from which you could by any possibility guess at its propositions, they please themselves with having made it speak a *rational* Christianity, when they have only destroyed every character which can alarm the guilty, or give peace to the alarmed. Thus it has fared with the doctrine of regeneration. The words of our Lord are so very simple and plain, that it requires some effort of ingenuity to mistake them. Yet they have not been able to escape. Criticism has laid her foul hands upon them, and by the aid of that machine called a figure, had at one time diluted them into baptism of water by the hands of a regularly ordained priest, and at another has made them typical of outward reformation, though always in such a form as to bespeak something clearly within the power of corrupted man, and

effectually to exclude the similitude of a *birth*. But it is so palpable as to need no proof that our Lord designates every effect produced by the agency of man *flesh*, and the effects produced by the agency of the Spirit of God *spirit*—that these effects are essentially contrasted—that they allow of no mixture, no concurrence, in the formation of the new birth—that they are, and necessarily must be, as different and opposite as flesh and spirit are—that alter, modify, refine, as much as you will, that which proceeds from the flesh, it is flesh still and nothing else, partaking exclusively of the nature of its author—so alter, modify, debase, if you can, that which proceeds from the Spirit of God, it is spirit still and nothing else, partaking exclusively of the nature of its blessed Author. He therefore denies that in this new birth there can be any co-partnership, co-operation, or concern whatever, of the power of man with the power of the Holy Spirit. They who become the subjects of it *are born, not of flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Our unrenewed nature, with all its propensities and habits, acts and inclinations, the scripture emphatically terms FLESH; using it as equivalent with our *old man*—with the *body of sin*, which is to be *put off*, to be *crucified*, to be *destroyed*, but never to be amended. There is not

such an idea to be found in the whole Bible, nor any thing which contains a shadow of it, as that of *reforming* the works of the devil. The Lord performs his gracious work by creating a *new man in Christ Jesus*, not by repairing the *old man*. Yet it is a common and ruinous error for a sinner to imagine, that if he cannot do all that is requisite to insure the kingdom of heaven, he can do much. If he cannot completely renew his heart, and make himself meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, he can do a great deal—or if not a great deal, can do something towards forwarding this desirable work. So that the Spirit of God, though he may have a large or even principal share in the glory, shall not have it all; but he shall himself receive due credit for improving the opportunities he had. Without taking up your time in exposing the ignorance and arrogance of such a pretension, I shall briefly observe, that it finds its way into the heart of every unconverted man, and has wound its insidious coil so firmly around many hearers of the gospel, that nothing short of a divine deliverer can set them at liberty.

To counteract so pernicious but natural a mistake is the manifest design of the text. Hear it, professed disciple, and let it stir thee up to a rigorous examination of thy exercise and attain-

ments: *That which is born of the flesh is* FLESH; *and that which is born of the Spirit is* SPIRIT.

Let me entreat you to accompany me through a short inquiry into those religious phenomena which, however specious, may rise no higher than corrupt nature, and wherein the work of the Spirit of God is to be distinguished from them.

I. Those religious phenomena to which corrupted nature is equal. *That which is born of the flesh is* FLESH.

1. Early impressions of serious things in a religious community.

Where a reverence of the gospel is established—where it pervades all the social habits, and especially where our own friends are under its influence—nothing is more natural or certain than that, under such circumstances, the religious feeling should become characteristic, and that many persons should imagine themselves to be true Christians, who know of no other power operating upon their minds than the power of imitation. How far this may be carried it is impossible to tell, but it is lamentable to think how deep and how extensive are the delusions which accompany it, and how immensely difficult is the recovery of persons involved in it. They were brought up in the profession of the Christian religion—it may be in the very exact

and austere performance of religious duties. Their parents, their ancestors, were all most exemplary in the same way, and who, if not themselves, should have a claim to the Christian character? I shall not admonish my hearers that there is no such thing as prescription in Christianity for a man's personal interest in its privileges. Unhappily, the argument is very short, very plain, and brings us directly to the conclusion of the text.

We happen to have known some who had no other religion than an hereditary religion, and who were reported as religiously inclined, but whose course soon proved how untrue was this opinion respecting them. We have seen numbers of them gradually throwing off their religious inclinations, and becoming perfectly content with the reputation of *honest* men. This reputation, indeed, they keep up, and it is highly honorable in them to do so; but for any resemblance to our Lord Jesus Christ—for any evidence that they pay the least regard to his authority or his glory—for any that they ever think of him—you might as well, to use a comparison of the ancients, you might as well look for a knot in a bulrush. I speak of all those who have been religiously educated, and have turned their backs upon that holy name which they were early taught to fear. I bring into my re-

monstrance millions of facts, and what is infinitely more terrible, millions of immortal souls that have sunk down to hell with all the benefit of a traditionary faith. If you will not hear me, hear them who have perished, and who can testify, by the most tremendous of all experience, that the religion of the father will not save the son; and that all in which they trusted was nothing more than the doings of the flesh, which never brought them out of the condemned world, nor ever enabled them to see the kingdom of God.

2. There are not a few among the men of more inquisitive minds, who hold the previous class of religionists in sufficient contempt. To inherit their faith as they would a tract of land or a bag of money—to be taught religion as they were taught their alphabet—or to join the cry and follow in the course of the multitude around them—appears to them ignoble and base, a sort of swindling for reputation upon the credit of more honest men. Christianity they are told upon the highest of all authority is a *reasonable service*, and they cannot conceive how any man, who consults his reasonable nature, can make an intelligent profession of a religion of which he has not examined the proofs; and he finds no difficulty in explaining the apostacy of those whom change of climate, of company, or the

habits of society, have introduced into a scene where their former principles and profession, if not disreputable, were at least of no advantage. For themselves they are satisfied, upon mature examination, that revelation is true, and furnishes the only solid ground of present peace and future blessedness. Demonstration is always the same; conviction founded upon it never alters; and consequently, go where they will, they carry their religion with them. Christianity is never insulted, nor Christians put to the blush, by their infidelity.

We are not now to learn that belief arising from personal research and conviction, is in matters of reasoning of a much higher order than any persuasion induced by the authority or example of others. And as there is no necessity, so we have no inclination, to disparage the rational evidence for Christianity, and the conviction growing out of it. We maintain, on the contrary, that genuine conviction of revealed truth, is the most rational thing imaginable; and that they who reject it, labor under disordered intellects. But it is still a most serious inquiry, whether the *merely* rational belief in the truth of the scriptures, such as has been described, has any connection with the salvation of the soul; or involves in the least degree the favor of God; or rises any higher than what our Lord

calls the flesh; i. e. whether it any more secures than can be attained by mere carnal reason, or is experienced by the *carnal mind, which is enmity against God.*

In his dispensations towards sinners, the Most High deals with them as with rational creatures, in whom their reason, though depraved, is not destroyed. He has therefore fortified his revelation by every sort of moral proof; so that his servants may always be *able to give a reason of the hope that is in them;* that every attack upon their faith and hope may be successfully repelled, and unbelievers left without excuse. But who does not see, that in order to accomplish its purpose, this must proceed upon principles common to the friends and the enemies of his gospel; upon principles strictly within the reach of the unsanctified mind. Accordingly, a man by the use of his natural though corrupted reason, may easily arrive at the conclusion that the Bible is the word of God; nay, that every particular doctrine therein revealed, not excluding the very doctrines on which the salvation of the soul depends, are undeniably his word, and may be quite as sound in his speculative opinions as the believer who stands highest in the records of life. All this is nothing more than drawing fair conclusions from simple and well established premises; and were this enough to constitute a

true Christian, the best logician would certainly be the soundest believer. But what is the fact? Are the most humble, tender, spiritual Christians to be found in the ranks of these men of reason? Does their religion ever stand in the way of those tempers and passions, which, the scripture being judge, shut them out of the *kingdom of God?* Do we not see them to be as careless of their immortal souls, and of the things that accompany salvation, as if going to heaven were a matter of course? or let men live as they please, there were no possible risk of being refused an entrance? Do we not often see them reproaching, reviling, persecuting, those who do not choose to be cast at last among *the devil and his angels*, for the sake of company? Do they not deal as freely in that courtly vocabulary which finds no more respectful epithets for those who *give all diligence to make their calling and election sure*, than "enthusiasts," "fanatics," "priest-ridden," "hypocrites," as the veriest infidel in the land? Do they not all the while retain their *religion*, profess to be undoubted believers, and inveigh loudly against those spiritual ruffians who would snatch away from us our faith and hope? What shall we now say to these things, with the proofs of which the whole face of the community is overspread? Shall we say that these men are in a scriptural sense,

Christians? that they have any mark about them of the *new creation?* that you could so much as suspect them to be *God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works?* The question is almost a libel upon human understanding, corrupted as it is? No, my friends, the utmost which this Christianity can pretend to, is a persuasion of the *fact* that the scripture is the word of God, and every one of its doctrines a part of his testimony. But between believing that they *are* his word, and believing *the testimony of God*, there is as wide a difference as between being in the kingdom of God, and being out of it. Apostasy does not prevent clear perceptions of abstract truth. The wickedest man upon earth may have his head filled with right notions. Suppose ye that the devil doubts of the divine original of scripture, or that he is not well versed in their sense. It is his puny disciples *here*, who, swelled with the pride of their philosophical character, murder and mangle it in a way of which Satan himself would be ashamed. There is, therefore, nothing in all we have been considering, that may not be the fruit of depraved principle—nothing that at all requires a better or holier parentage. It may be, it often is, *born of the flesh*, and as worthless and unholy as the source from which it springs—it *is flesh.*

3. Some men's affections are much engaged in religious things—they undergo strong excitement, and these pass for evidence of a divine change.

In drawing this conclusion, has due allowance been made for the excitement of the preacher; for the energy, the pathos, the eloquence, of his manner? Have you not known some hearers of the word to be awed into seriousness, softened into tenderness, melted into tears? to experience these effects repeatedly, and yet manifest to the entire conviction of every observer, that they were only for the moment—a shower upon a rock; copious while the cloud poured, and instantly dried off. Has due allowance been made for the *occasion*, often of itself so touching as to subdue the feelings of the heart? for the time of life, or for the natural temperament, which, in minds of gentler mould, is extremely susceptible of soft impressions? for the power of sympathy, which the strongest nerve cannot always resist? and which bears down alike him who came to pray, and him who came to scoff. What multitudes of conversions, as they have been hastily called, has our day seen, which were to be referred to groanings, and screechings, and fallings, and faintings, and other extravagancies of a heated imagination, which have yet been extolled as the work of the Spirit of

God, and which have left behind them nothing but that animal lassitude which follows a fit of great excitement, or it may be something worse? To this general remark upon the effects of high-wrought feeling, ministers of the gospel ought to pay some attention. When God bestows a peculiar talent, he intends that it shall be employed, and the amployment is generally obvious. The power of strong reasoning—of rousing the secure—of comforting the afflicted—of animating exhortation—of pathetic persuasion, he has distributed as it pleased him; to some after this manner, to another after that. Employ what he has given you for the glory of the giver. Reason—rouse—comfort—exhort—persuade, as he hath enabled you; he will take care that his own gifts, properly used, shall do no harm. But never attempt, by unhallowed means, to stir up artificial emotions. Violent intonations, vehement utterances, furious gesticulations, irreverent boldness, you may put off for zeal, but you must not father your absurdities, nor its effects, upon the Spirit of God. Sooner or later he will bring you into disgrace, and show the spiritual children whom you think you have *begotten in the gospel*, to be indeed born *after your own image*. There is nothing in all this commotion of the affections, nor all the religion which is ascribed to it, that the *flesh* may not produce.

bear in mind the parable of the stony-ground hearers, and the pungent lamentation over ancient failures. *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as the morning cloud; and as the early dew it goeth away.*

4. Among the professors of Christianity, are some who lay a stress upon their *works* and their *zeal.*

It is quite an aphorism in religion, that *faith without works is dead, being alone:* and when the world is so full of lip-service, of Pharisees who *say and do not,* it is some relief to find any who *do as well as say;* and it seems harsh to question any thing in the shape of practical piety. We might however freely admit the amount of what is done, and yet tax the age, much as its liberality has been celebrated, with great niggardliness in promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ. It is by the contributions of poor people, swelling the mass by their number, that those mighty operations which are now shaking the nations, have been chiefly commenced and carried on. To hear wealthy men, wearing the Christian name, pleading their inability to do what the twentieth part of their means, in the hands of those whose hearts lie in the right place, would do without difficulty, without complaint, without touching on a single earthly comfort, does

not give a very high idea of prevailing bounty; and the complacency with which they talk of the wonderful occurrences of the day, looks very like a petition to the poor for a scrap of reputation. But passing this: allowing as much credit as is claimed on the score of alms and other good works; are there no donations to pious and charitable purposes, given but from a motive which the Searcher of hearts approves, and will reward? This question, it is true, lies between the donor and his God. But to him, it is awfully serious. How much is done from mere constitutional generosity? How much from the influence of example? How much from the force of importunity? How much from sectarian pride? How much from sheer vanity? all of which is set down to the credit of religion: but not a farthing of which will be allowed as such in that day when the Son of man shall appear in his glory, to give to every one according to his works! In this great inquiry, the *quantity* will be of no account; the widow's mite will not outweigh the rich man's treasures, if the motive of both be alike reprehensible: and neither will be of any value, where evangelical charity was wanting. You *may give all your goods to feed the poor*, or to do the community any other service, yet without that heavenly grace, charity, you will be nothing. How many splendid mon-

uments are at this hour in existence of so false and delusive a liberality. It is very true, that few churches are now built, or hospitals founded, or colleges endowed, by the death-bed legacies of men, who seek to compensate in the last moment by such acts of equivocal piety, whole lives of iniquity and rapine, and to bribe the keeper of purgatory by the tender of gold which they cannot retain; but there are other, cheaper, more Christian-like forms of deception, where the light of truth has driven popery with her monks, penalties, pardons, and the whole rabble of her imposture from all respect in the public opinion.

We live at a time when the zeal for diffusing Bibles and for sending missionaries swallows up almost every other species of religious zeal, and when mere men of the world, judges, generals, politicians, are among the foremost in seconding and sometimes in leading the popular enthusiasm. It is good—it is glorious—it is the doing of the Lord. The silver is his—the gold is his—and he is pressing it into Messiah's service. But do none of those who are engaged in this holy work lay upon it an unscriptural stress? Is there not a righteousness fabricated from it of no firmer texture, nor valuable material, than the giving a Bible to a pauper or a dollar to an Indian mission? Do not many deceive their

souls with a notion, that to be a member of a Bible society is nearly if not quite equivalent to entering into the kingdom of God? And, though the idea is too gross to be formally avowed, is there not a fancy lurking about the heart that a five-dollar bill is about enough to purchase the kingdom of heaven? If we should judge from the reluctance with which some men part with a little money for a purpose confessedly the most noble that is prosecuted upon earth, our conclusion would not be far from the fact. It will be well if individuals, who are trusting to such performances as these, do not at last meet with that fatal and final repulse: *I know you not; depart from me ye workers of iniquity!* All such things can be explained without the supposition of a particle of preternatural grace. They may all at best proceed from the workings of a corrupted principle; they can be no better nor purer than their source, *for that which is born of the flesh is* FLESH.

This train of reflection might be carried out into a long detail; but I forbear, and call your attention to notice by what, in the

II. Place, a real work of the Spirit of God may be distinguished from every work of the flesh. *That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

1. Where the Spirit of God performs his gracious work, he introduces into the soul a *new*

principle altogether. This he has himself called a new man—a new creature—a being created anew in Christ Jesus. It is more than an improvement of our old faculties or affections. It partakes of the nature of its blessed Author. It is spirit—all spirit—nothing but spirit. It can receive no aliment from the flesh. It is supported by its immediate intercourse with the eternal Spirit. It brings into a fellowship of which "flesh" has no manner of conception, with the living God. It is hidden—a sacred secret—hidden with the Lord Jesus Christ—with Christ in God—as perfectly impervious to the observation and inexplicable to the understanding of carnal men, as are the thoughts and affections of Christ himself. *The world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.* When you can find out Jesus Christ, you can find out a Christian, but not till then. He is utterly out of your world, the scene of your investigation. He is, as a Christian, where your researches never penetrated, and never can penetrate. I undertake not to explain his interior and spiritual life. I have no language that can describe him, nor have strangers to his peculiarities any ideas to comprehend him. But I bless the Lord, my Savior, that when the simple proposition is announced, *that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*, there are some within these walls whose yearning hearts fly into his

meaning, and can attest the fact. They have just as good evidence of its existence as they have of their own—their *consciousness.* I cannot impart this evidence to the mind of another man; but to *me* it is paramount to all others. *The Spirit of God also witnesses with their spirits that they are the children of God;* giving such perceptions and consciousness of the fact as set all disputation at defiance. These indeed are favored moments even to the most favored disciples. But there are other things, other consciousnesses, which, in the midst of general doubt, and under the blackness of temptations, show infallibly the operation of the Spirit of grace, a new life, a new principle, and order of living; for,

2. That which is born of the Spirit believes the testimony of God.

It was suggested above, that to believe that the Bible *is* the testimony of God, and to believe the testimony itself, makes all the difference of being in the kingdom of God and being out of it—all the difference between being real believers in Christ Jesus and believers in name only—between having the form of godliness and its power also. This is a peculiarity common to all that have been *born of the Spirit.* It is the *idiom* of their character which the men of mere rational conviction can never learn. A

plain Christian believes every jot and tittle of divine revelation because God hath said it, and looks no farther for the ground of his faith. Arguments from miracles, from prophecy, and the whole stock of moral proofs, internal and external, have, properly speaking, nothing to do in forming his persuasion. He has higher, holier, more perfect ground, on which to build his faith, than the most conclusive reasoner the world ever saw is able to furnish. He *believes the* WITNESS *of God* because it is HIS witness. He has got up to the fountain-head of truth—the most victorious evidence that can shed its light into the created mind. When he perceives the authority of the ever blessed God in its glory and majesty, no mathematician was ever half so sure of a demonstration in Euclid as he is of the truth of that portion of the word of grace thus divinely attested. This explains at once why Christians, though without any learning—though extremely limited in their capacities of attaining it—are yet so firm in their faith, and are not to be circumvented by those who *speak lies in hypocrisy*, nor by the *craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive*. They may catch in their toils, as we see every day, the witty, the wise, the disputer, the reasoner, of this world, but they lay not their sacrilegious hands upon God's elect. He has given them by the regenerating Spirit an

understanding to know him that is TRUTH, and has made them so one with him *as to be in him that is true, even in his son Jesus Christ.* This Jesus Christ is the true God, therefore he is the eternal life. Nor is there any power in hell or out of it to move them from that ground. Seest thou that man? He walks by faith, not by sight. He is one of those guileless souls, who cannot *argue* for *Christ*, but he can *burn* for him; and while the flames are consuming his body, can commit it to the Lord Jesus, with infinite confidence of its being raised up in glory to an incorruptible inheritance. How came he by his faith? Does it rest upon your reasoning, or any thing of the sort? Upon *your* reasoning?—a poor, feeble, blundering creature like himself! Why he would not burn one of his fingers for a string of your syllogisms long enough to belt the earth; and a rare fool would he be if he should. Other influence has been at work. The *Spirit of faith* has touched his heart. He has revealed Christ Jesus in him the hope of glory, and made his *faith to be the evidence of things not seen, the substance of things hoped for. Through* this *faith the elders obtained a good report*, and the same faith must possess, and fill, and rule, in every bosom that entertains a scriptural expectation of *seeing God.*

3. That which is born of the Spirit cherishes the highest esteem of our Lord Jesus Christ. *He shall glorify me*, said the Savior, *for he shall take of mine and shall show it unto you.*

There are people, with great professions of religion, that take much pains to hinder the world from thinking too highly of Jesus Christ. They even try to degrade him below his own angels; and if that were not enough, can feed their vanity by a comparison between him and themselves, in which they have quite the advantage. A ringleader of one of these sects did not scruple thus to qualify his commendation, that "Jesus Christ was a very good man, but no philosopher." He claimed to be a philosopher himself, and who then was the more important personage in his eyes is manifest enough. (Such blasphemy, which treats our Lord Jesus Christ with less respect than does the devil himself, never came from the Holy Spirit, nor fouled the mouths of any who were born of him.) The scriptures, on the contrary, magnify him with every form of elevated and high-wrought expression. There he has a name which is above every name. He is seated at the right hand of God. He sends forth the angels to do his will, and glorious as they are, they are commanded to worship him even when he was an incarnate babe. He sits arbiter of the fate

of men and devils. The great empire of the grave is under his control. The generations of the dead come forth at his bidding, and not one of them shall escape his righteous doom. In short, every name proper to the true God—every term by which the attributes of deity can be expressed—the whole stock of human language is exhausted to heap up epithets of glory upon Jesus Christ. There are things with which the soul of a believer is in perfect accord. They delight him even to rapture. Nothing good and glorious is too good and glorious for his gracious Redeemer. Has he loved *me* and given *himself* for *me*? Do I owe my place among the ransomed of the Lord to his unmerited, unutterable grace? Come, fellow-citizens of the saints, ye household of salvation, strike all your harps at once! Come, ye holy ones on earth, and ye holy ones in heaven, tune up your sweetest anthems! Lift up your grateful hands, and crown him Lord of all! Thus a *Christian* feels towards his Redeemer. It is that which is born of the Spirit, breathing the air and enjoying the elasticity of the spiritual world.

4. That which is born of the Spirit, makes incessant use of the Spiritual Savior.

He has said, *without me ye can do nothing;* and so a Christian finds it. His attachment to his Redeemer, is not to make a parade on a gala

day, and have done with it: it is necessary for his habitual walk. The blood of Christ, which has washed away his sins—the merits of Christ, from which he gets his title to eternal life, must every hour exert their virtue upon his soul. He cannot go to the throne of grace without the blood of sacrifice, and the interceding priest—can perform none of his duties, endure none of his trials, face none of his foes, but in the strength of his heavenly leader—*but through Christ strengthening him, he can do all things.* This man is a Christian—born of the Spirit—all his characteristics are spiritual, and with him *Christ is all and in all.*

Now, friends and brethren, who and what are ye? To whom do you belong, and whither are ye going? Search and look: for upon the decision of these questions hangs your eternity, and you may be just upon the brink. Do not deceive yourselves. A Christian is not of earthly materials or manufacture. Flesh and blood, with all its powers, attainments, and persuasions, can do nothing for you. The Spirit of God must do the work—he must open your eyes—must renew your hearts—must lead you to Jesus—must do every thing—for if you are his, you are *his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before prepared that ye should walk in them.* But *if*

any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his; and whatever may be his security, his hope, or his presumption, will be disowned in that day, when one word of approbation will be worth more than a thousand worlds.

TRUE HONOR.

SERMON VI.

TRUE HONOR.

JOHN V. 44.

How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?

Next to a being perfectly holy, there is nothing so indefatigable as a mind given to wickedness. Let the life of Jesus Christ supply the proof. From the beginning to the end of his public course, he encountered the contradiction of sinners; walked among their snares; and sustained, in every shape, ceaseless conflict with their hatred and hostility. That they were invariably foiled, exposed, disgraced, did not in

the least deter them from repeating the same hopeless experiment. In fact, having all shared in their turns the same fate, the ignominy of their defeat was too much divided to be a reproach. The Pharisee could not point at the Sadducees, nor these at the Herodians, because the finger of scorn could be pointed back again. There was no public opinion which they regarded, to frown them into decency. It came to be a practical maxim with them, that to be defeated and silenced by Jesus Christ, was no disgrace; and they were too closely united in the brotherhood of guilt to suffer any abatement of their rancor. (The professing world affords, so far as I know, but one parallel of their malevolence and persecution; and that is to be found among the self-styled rational and philosophical Christians.) They seized the occasion of his curing the impotent man on the sabbath day, to accuse him as a breaker of God's laws; and when he vindicated himself on this principle, *My Father worketh hitherto and I work*, they heightened their accusation into a charge of blasphemy, and *sought the more to kill him, because he had not only broken the sabbath, but said that God was his father, making himself equal with God.* What wrongs and insults did the Lord Jesus endure at the hands of these ancient Unitarians! (Wrongs and iusults to be

surpassed only by those from the heirs of their unbelief, the modern Unitarians.) Their imputation of blasphemy he repels, by claiming such prerogatives, powers, and honors, as are proper to God only; and winds up his defense, by giving these hypocrites a sensible proof that he was all what they deemed it blasphemy in him to pretend to be; gave them this sensible proof by breaking open the recesses of their hearts, bringing into light their secret principles of action, and proving to their faces the base and abominable motives of their conduct. The applause of men lay at the bottom of their zeal for God, and effectually excluded all love for him, and all faith in his testimony. *How can ye believe, who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor which cometh from God only.*

This rebuke to pharisaical pride, and explanation of pharisaical unbelief, contains a principle of universal application: the *inconsistency of receiving honor from men, with the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.* They are such eternal opposites, that they cannot live in the same heart. Whoever cleaves to the one, must let the other go. We cannot, indeed, determine the existence in this matter of a corrupt propensity with the precision of our Lord Jesus Christ, nor could any of his apostles; because we have not, nor had they, like him, the faculty of searching

the heart. But availing ourselves of his declarations, and pursuing the path which his spirit has marked out for us in the word, we shall, by his grace, be enabled to assist others in the important and difficult work of searching their own hearts. Let us therefore, try to fix by this rule, the reigning principles of men *who receive honor of one another;* and why they produce an *impediment, amounting to an absolute impossibility, of believing on our Lord Jesus Christ?*

I. What are the reigning principles of men who receive honor one of another.

A good name, saith the scripture, *is rather to be chosen than great riches.* He who has once discarded it from the number of his inestimable things—who is at no pains to keep it up—who would as soon commit an act from which his character is sure to loose as one from which it is as sure to gain, has found his place among the offscourings of human nature, and is one of the most dangerous enemies to human peace. It is a false indulgence, a pernicious liberty, which permits a man to go at large who has forgotten to blush. We should sadly mistake the Redeemer's meaning, if we supposed that he intends to untie the bands of civil society, or those ruffian hands which would gladly engage in the detestable work. His own people guard their characters with the utmost vigilance, and are

the foremost to cultivate *whatsoever things are of good report.* To have therefore, a good name—to be well reported of for good works—to enjoy the praises of other men, for upright principles and worthy deeds, is no obstacle to our faith; it is its natural consequence.

But the scriptures, while they set its just value upon a fair fame in the eyes of men, never propose it as the end or as the recompense of actions substantially correct. They refer every thing to the authority of God as its reason, and to his approbation as its reward. Their design throughout, is to bring us back to the God from whom we have deeply revolted; to break the power of all meaner influences and motives; to elevate our views to him, the only source of duty, honor, and happiness; making him the centre of all our affections, as he is of all holy intelligences; and turning all our thoughts to *him first, him midst, him last, him without end.*

The character of the Pharisees was precisely the reverse of this: and so is the character of all who, like them, *receive honor one of another.* Good things they did, many of them—good things for number and kind, which far outstrip the deeds of some who think that they sufficiently prove their faith by their works. The Pharisee, *who thanked God that he was not like other men, extortioners, adulterers, unjust, nor*

even like the poor sinner of a publican that stood beside him, who fasted twice in the week, who gave tithes of all that he possessed, leaves far behind him in the race both of negative and positive virtues, many a gallant and many a grave professor of Christianity. O could we bring them to but the half of the Pharisee's liberality, there should never be any lack of means for religious purposes. Yet he who *knew what was in man*, has planted his anathema upon the Pharisee's glory, and has told us most explicitly, that *except our righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.* Why, what was it that spoiled so fair a show? What made so rich a stockholder a bankrupt in the wealth of the skies, and exhibited him to the eyes of holy angels and men, a more wretched pauper than the beggar whose rags were his wardrobe, and his seat a dunghill? This: he *loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.* All his devotions were performed, all his virtues displayed, all his distinctions sought, for the ostentation of human notice, and the breath of human applause. *God was not in all his thoughts*—that which he coveted, he obtained—he got *his reward*, and *lost his soul. So shall my heavenly Father do also unto you*, if your *inward parts*, like his, *are* found to be *very rottenness.* Let us

take this dreadful character, enlightened as it is with the curse of God, and carry it round among the religious community, to see if it warns none to fear an equally terrible fate.

Let us see whether its brand of reprobation is not upon many a profession which cries "Lord, Lord," with the air of a disciple, and confidently calculates upon a triumphant issue.

A marked revolution has taken place within a few years in the public sentiment. Most of us can remember when scepticism, like an overflowing stream, rushed through our land. It penetrated alike into the cabinet, the office, the shop, the employments of agriculture; the circulation of the Bible was stopped; the bench, the bar, the schools of medicine and of merchandise, the mechanic and the farmer, were infected with the mania. Our boys must set up for free-thinking before they were capable of thinking at all. To laugh at the scriptures was quite as necessary for a fine gentleman as to defraud his humble creditors by petty acts of dishonesty. A scrap of Paine's stolen ribaldry was a sufficient answer to the Christian bigot. In short, a vast multitude of our people in these United States agreed in crying down the Bible and crying up the philosopher of infidelity.

The transition was too violent. The shock to national habit and the national conscience alto-

gether insupportable. People, awakened from their dream, discovered that when they threw away the Bible they were *without God*, and that without God they were *without hope in the world.*

A revulsion, forcible in proportion to the extreme into which they had been driven, was the natural result; and the tide of opinion set in strongly in a contrary, i. e. in a Christian direction—a direction in which it continues to run at this day, and so may it continue to run till that day, when our Lord Jesus Christ *shall take to him his great power and reign.*

To the current of public opinion returning into its wonted channels there was another cause, which powerfully co-operated in aiding the same general effect.

In some parts of the country infidelity was found to be intimately associated with odious politics, and straightway those very men who, if left to themselves, had been thorough infidels, became vigorous Christians, that they might be removed as far as possible from every point of communion with *Jacobins;* insomuch that in a great town, among the descendants of the pilgrims, whose public worship had fallen into disrepute, and was much neglected among the higher orders, it became a fashion to go to *church*, which fashion has continued; though whether the ministrations which they support have any

thing in common with the faith of their fathers or with the word of God, or can in any manner assist a sinner who desires to know what he shall do to be saved, is a question on which none but the most melancholy negatives can be given. Besides, in many sections of the land, there have been manifest effusions of the Holy Spirit of God. He has been as the rain, and he has been as the dew—sometimes more powerfully and sometimes more gently influencing the hearts of men. Many, we have reason to hope, were brought safely under the bond of God's covenant; and many, we have reason to fear, have turned like the *dog to his vomit, and like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*

These things concurred in giving to the public feeling an irresistible impulse. With all the secret enmity which prevails against true religion, as implacable and bitter as ever, there is great external respect shown to the forms and profession of Christianity. *Infidel* is now a term of reproach. Such being the state of society, can we imagine that all who name the name of Christ do it in simplicity and truth? from the constraining power of his *love*? Among the ten thousand hail masters which fill our ears are there no Iscariot voices? No lips which convert the token of tender affection into the medium of treason? No hearts which are appa-

rently with the disciples and in reality with the adversary? No hand which meets the hand of Jesus in the dish and is prepared to make merchandise of his blood? Should a *mighty wind* from heaven *shake our fig-tree*, would not the ground be strewed *with her untimely figs*?

To speak plainly, are there not multitudes among professed Christians, whose sole or chief motive is the reputation which they enjoy? Who are held to their allegiance purely by the tie of popularity? There is some credit attached to the Christian name; and while that credit lasts, none are more strenuous Christians. But should the times change—should God in his providence permit the enemy again to come in like a flood—should Christianity be accounted infamous, or be subjected to heavy worldly sacrifices or personal perils—alas! alas! for the visible church! How would her ranks be thinned by desertion! and the Captain of salvation be left with those few followers to whom he has *given the white stone and the new name!* (Those synagogues indeed nick-named rational churches, would lose nothing. Times of apostacy are always propitious to the recruiting service of Satan, and apostates the first to grasp at his bounty-money, and to cry, *Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?* But) How many of whom we had reason to

hope for things that accompany salvation, would draw back unto perdition? Examine quickly, while the hour of forbearance is not yet exhausted, ye who are allured by the respectability of religion into a profession of the faith. You are at best receiving honor one of another, and your name at present must be erased from the *album*, the list of those who believe on the Son of God.

In the next place, our Lord Jesus Christ, when *he ascended up on high, received gifts for men*, which he distributes in his sovereignty as it hath pleased him. Among these corruption finds much fuel for unhallowed profession. To particularize:

1. The ministry of the word.

By the very nature of the case, as well as by the institution of the Redeemer, this office exercises a powerful influence upon the church and on society, and has a proportional degree of honor connected with it. True, where it is stripped of the support of a civil establishment, it can seldom boast any *golden* charms. A man may often shave more gold out of a block of timber than he can from his services in the ministry; but there are men not a few, whose ambition lies in another direction, and who regard as dross all money beyond the supply of their immediate necessities. Now, to such men

of a literary turn and of decent moral habits, the pulpit presents what would be called a fair object of secular ambition. To appear once or twice a week in a marked distinction—to enjoy prerogatives which custom at least has rendered inviolable (the effectual and the only safeguard of many a preacher)—to exhibit the resources of intellect with the attractions of taste and the corruscations of genius—to enforce valuable moral truth by eloquence which shall be followed in the public assembly by silent admiration, and out of it by applause and celebrity—and a respect and influence unattainable in ordinary stations—what carnal heart is proof against these temptations? It is woful to consider that the devil has, through these means, succeeded in planting his servants down in stations which were intended for Zion's watchmen. Love to the souls of men and to the Savior of their souls —a sense of their dire responsibility for the blood of men and an honest desire to be faithful, never entered the minds of some who have yet rushed fearlessly into the ministry. The calling is reputable; they wish to sustain its repute in the eyes of the world; they receive honor from men; it is the aliment of their hope, the object of their anxiety. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ they have none. Not a thievish publican nor a strolling harlot who are not nearer

the kingdom of God than they, and their ultimate reckoning will be dreadful beyond description.

Besides the pulpit there are other talents of which our Lord shall exact an account. It is distressing to think that for the most part he will exact it of those who never fairly brought them into exercise; and on the other hand, that many whom he never employed have industriously run into forbidden paths. I know not a more unchristian doctrine, nor one more pregnant with practical mischiefs, than the doctrine which takes the part of the *gifted brethren.* These brethren, if they invade not your pulpits, which, thanks to the good order established in some churches they cannot do, nevertheless lay hold of the public praying societies. On all occasions they are ready—on all occasions foremost. They are compared with the ministry, and sometimes not to the advantage of the latter. In process of time they begin to try their hand at exhortation—next at preaching—and where, do they say, is the mighty difference? And thus with self-complacency they edge onwards, until the ministry is surprised by the intrusion and pollution of those to whom God never gave talent, nor man cultivation. Mistake me not. I am no enemy to prayer nor to praying societies. But I am an enemy to that

withdrawing of men out of their proper place. I am an enemy to whatever would fill them with an improper conceit of themselves. I am an enemy to this giving undue honor to those to whom it is not due, and to converting the worship of God into a vehicle for the vanity of man, and of the smallest of men. There is much ground to fear that many a man's condemnation will be founded on his distinction at a praying society. He wished to be noticed—he *was* noticed. To be talked of—he *was* talked of. To be praised—he *was* praised. He sought honor of men—he got it, and it is all he is likely to get. He *sought not the honor that cometh from God only*, and will be found at last to have not been even a believer in Jesus Christ.

I have not time to trace the different forms in which, under religious pretenses, *men receive honor one of another*, to the detriment of all sound principle and the destruction of their own souls. It remains to show

II. Why the prevalence of such a temer is inconsistent with the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. It involves a principle essentially sinful.

God alone is the universal monarch, the single fountain of true honor, throughout the universe. When we seek our honor in any other quarter, to the neglect of that which cometh

from him alone, we enter into a conspiracy against his throne. We exalt into his place, and give the glory due to his name, to creatures, to men, and often to bad men. We love, we pursue, we worship, a phantom. We set up the stumbling block of our iniquity in our hearts—commit that high rebellion which he has visited from age to age, and now visits, and will continue to visit till the consummation of all things, with his sharpest rebukes, his heaviest curses. To *receive honor from one another, while we seek not the honor that cometh from God only*, is to cherish in our hearts the very core of corruption, to identify ourselves in our characters and interests with the fallen spirits, and to expose ourselves infallibly to their fate. What can be conceived more horrible, more utterly at variance with the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, more deserving of eternal damnation, than to declare practically that we have found a more bountiful benefactor—a nobler object of our praise—a more sufficient portion for our hearts—a richer source of good—than the living God. And what do they do less, who seek their *honor one of another*, in preference to that *which cometh from God only?*

2. Receiving honor from men necessarily implies criminal conformity to the world of sinners.

That which we most respect, admire, and love, we are prone to imitate. It is a law of our being; and has its place, and exerts its force, in the formation of spiritual as well as other character. If you receive honor from the world, as contradistinguished from the honor which cometh from God only, you must of necessity be like the world; i. e. be most unlike God, who calls *his people into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ.* The world also exercises a stern, despotic power, over its votaries. You must obey its maxims; you must adopt its modes; you must speak its language; you must cultivate its temper; you must be the friend of its friends, and the enemy of its enemies; or its honor will be denied to you, and you will be excommunicated from within its pale. The world will not throw away its honors upon those who undervalue them; and why should it? I do not mean that you must abjure a religious profession: profess what you please, but go no farther, or not so far as to war with its doctrines, and renounce its practices. You may have as much of a religious air, and be as devout in your religious observances, as you think proper, and lose none of your honor from men. The world knows that you may have all these, often more of their appearances, than many whom it cannot endure; and be sound in its interests all the while. Keep

it company, and wear its image, and it will never quarrel with you for walking in the *broad way*, with a Christian mark. But the moment you open your heart to one particle of the love of God, or faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, you are ruined, you are hated, despised, proscribed. Now, how can this friendly correspondence with the world, without which it is vain to look for its honors, consist with the condition and character of a true believer? How can it admit that gracious singularity which is mocked on earth, but displays unutterable glories before the angels of God? How does it accord with being *pilgrims and strangers, who seek a better country, that is an heavenly?* How with that state of separation which their God hath commanded: *Come ye out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.* Brethren, the thing is impossible. And so it is decided, *if any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him.* As receiving *honor one from another*, is by the terms of the text in opposition to *seeking that honor that cometh from God only*, and as it implies a participation of all those tempers and feelings which are exactly the reverse of all the teachings and influence of the Spirit of God, it follows, that so long as a man

continues thus to receive honor, so long as he lays such a stress upon human approbation, it is simply and forever impossible that he should be a believer in Jesus Christ, or have the smallest share in his salvation, or one single hope towards God, which will not perish as infallibly as the leaf fades and falls in autumn.

This receiving honor one of another, deceives men by its specious form.

The love of honor, is a principle of our nature as it came from the hands of its Divine Maker. He framed us for glory, honor, and immortality. But its beauties are all laid waste, and its direction wholly perverted, by that universal destroyer, Sin. Yet the principle, though depraved, remains, is found to operate most strongly in the most ingenuous spirits, and has actually gone so far as avowedly to dispute the empire with the law of God. We hear it confidently stated, as if it were a moral axiom, that there are two laws for society, religion, and the law of honor; and that when a man disregards the sanctions of one, he is amenable to the other. A notable expedient for a sinful worm, to improve the moral governmont of God his maker! Besides, we are bound, even by the law of God, to render *honor where honor is due.* Great private worth, and public services, command, and should command, our most respectful homage. But the misery

is, that this homage, and this love of honor, twine round about the soul, and terminate without looking farther. It makes the man forget his immortal destiny—forget the crown of righteousness—forget the righteous Judge, and cleave to earth, and the voice of earthly praise, as to the perfection of his bliss. This principle is most observable in political and military men. I shudder when I think the applauses of our country are avowedly the motives and the reward of our most distinguished men; and when I see the public press commending the greatness and magnanimity of the sentiment, and diffusing the moral pestilence through a thousand streams into the very heart of the community—and that too, in many instances, under the control of men called Christians—but who seem to forget on these occasions, that God, or his glory, has any claim on their presses. O happy for them, if God too were to forget all the indignities which they have put upon his name. I have assigned a reason which makes it very hard for Christianity to thrive in a camp, or in a cabinet: and it is quite a rarity, an eighth wonder of the world, to find a godly soldier or statesman. How melancholy the reflection, that from the field of honor, in the very centre of their glories, our bravest men are often summoned in an instant to their eternal reckoning,

without having, perhaps, had in their lives one serious thought of the God with whom they have to do! Alas! what will the honor derived from men avail them at his bar! My heart sickens at the thought; and finds no relief but from the assurance that they are in the hands of one who will do them no injustice.

4. Finally, the sin of which I speak, making the honor that cometh from men, to compensate and supersede that which cometh from God only, cannot be excused as a sin of infirmity. The strength of physical passions, the suddenness and the violence of temptation, have here no place. It is a sin of *calculation*. The whole soul enters into it; habits are formed by it; and habits do not spring up like mushrooms, they grow by slow degrees. The last, though at all times a feeble apology for crime, surprises, the being taken unawares, is swept away. It is a deliberate, systematic rebellion against God. It is the indulgence of willful transgression, which is utterly inconsistent with every gracious principle, and where it reigns, marks, without a peradventure an, unbeliever in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, my friends, if these things are true, and that they are is just as certain as that God hath spoken to us, how wide a scope and how terrible a necessity do they create for the exa-

mination of our own hearts! Who does not, in some shape or other, fall under the accusation of the text? Be persuaded to make diligent search; for while it stands against a single individual, it infallibly shuts him out of the kingdom of God. Should an angel be commissioned by revelation to go among the hearers of the gospel—the professors of the religion of Jesus Christ—and put his mark upon the forehead of all who are under the ban of the text, whose forehead would be without a stigma? Would it be thine? Why then does thy bosom heave and thy heart palpitate? Why wilt thou not learn betimes to seek the honor that cometh from God only? How long shall the opinion of men usurp its place? How long will ye seek in political or fashionable life that applause which the Lord abhors and may, and without his great prevention will, draw after it your eternal destruction? Where is the man who has made even honorable politics his pursuit whose religious sensibilities were not blunted, and his conscience of rectitude warped? Who has carried into the vortex of the political whirlpool a mind uncontaminated with the corruption that is in the world, and brought it out again equally pure?

Among all the votaries of fashion in whom the religious sense is not wholly obliterated,

who has attempted to conciliate the service of God with the honor that cometh one from another and succeeded? Whose garments have not smelt, whose visages have not been blackened, by the infernal fire which they have been compelled to approach? Who has not learned some maxims, or indulged some practice, which has put a wider separation between God and them, and prepared them for a deeper plunge into transgression when the next opportunity should offer? Shall I propose the question? Are there any whose lips have received the hallowed symbols of the body and blood of Jesus the Savior, and whose feet, ere the taste of that holy pledge had died away, have gone greedily into the same excess of riot with those who walk in the vanity of their minds? In a word, are there none whose consciences whisper to them that the inspiring motive to all their religious appearance and profession has been the applauses of their fellow-men? What shall I say to them all? Awake! arise! flee! flee for your lives from this treacherous ground that stretches over the edge of the bottomless pit! Soon may the voice of that thunder be heard which shall shake it into fragments beneath your feet, and you are irrevocably ingulfed. Even now the cry of despair from some who were gay and careless as any of you can be, rings in my ear.

They were taken unprepared and hurried away with all their reasonings, their decencies, their mistaken religion, and have found their error when the hope of redemption was past! See that this be not your case. See to it soon—see to it immediately. To-day is the accepted time —to-day is the day of salvation. Be not deceived. Yet a little while and *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance of those who know not God and obey not the gospel.* The Lord grant that you may be able to stand before him in that final and fiery visitation!

APOSTOLIC COMMISSION.

SERMON VII.

APOSTOLIC COMMISSION.

LUKE XXIV. 47.

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

The work which the Father had given the Lord Jesus to do was now finished. He had gone through the several stages of his humiliation, and had ceased to be the *man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.* He had magnified the law and made it honorable, and brought in everlasting righteousness, even the righteousness of God, for the justification of men. He had put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, pouring out the blood of his cross as a ransom

for their souls. He had passed through the gates of death—had remained in his territories long enough to prove the fact of his having died, and to work the overthrow of his kingdom—had risen in his majesty and repassed as a conqueror those barriers through which he was led as a prisoner—had frustrated, defeated, and made an open show of the hosts of hell, and was just about ascending in the glory of the Captain of salvation up to his native heavens, there to appear in the presence of God for us! How awful the pause! how tender yet terrifying the crisis! Methinks the cry is heard to the farthest verge of Creation, *Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ.* The partition-wall is tottering to its base, and presently will be heard the crash of its fall. The gates of heavenly light are to be unbarred to the world, and floods of living water from the rock of Zion are to cool and refresh and invigorate the nations. The tabernacle of God is to dwell with men; they are to become his people; he is to be their God; he is to dwell among them, to walk in the midst of them, to cast out the prince of this world, and to bring back the days of primeval glory and blessedness. What! is all this to be effected in our world? Yes! in *our* world! Why, it is full of crimes and curses;

it is overrun with the enemies of God. Devils and devilish men have the rule here. The soil is yet reeking with the blood of the Prince of life. Not a bosom heaves nor a tear starts under the guilt of this "deep damnation." How then shall this marvelous revolution be accomplished? Gather together the wise men, the philosophers; ask them whether the scheme is practicable, whether these fairy visions can be realized. The wise men! the philosophers! They are deep in the great apostasy; they are themselves ringleaders in treason, leaders of the bands of rebels; they are as ignorant as they are criminal. Away with their fooleries! Let me hear the Son of God breathe this portentous silence, *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.* He who controls the spirits of all flesh issues forth the command in its simple majesty, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Observe, my Christian friends, the grandeur of this commission. The Lord Jesus speaks like one who had the "spirits of all flesh" under his control. The magnitude of the object, the difficulty of the enterprise, the feebleness of the means, are not so much as mentioned. *Let there be light*, was not uttered with more decision at the first creation, than is this charge to his apostles at the second. The speaker and the energy were the same. It

was all worthy of God manifest in the flesh, and so surely as his lips have pronounced the words the effect must follow. The disciples felt their power. Eleven men, without arms or armies, influence, connections, wealth, or literature, are sent to subdue the nations. Not a remonstrance, a scruple, or a doubt, is heard from their lips. *I am with you always, I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist*, hushed every fear, resolved every difficulty, filled them with courage, crowned them with success.

The text embraces three topics of most interesting inquiry: the extent of the apostolic commission, the substance of their message, and a singular circumstance connected with the commencement of their labors. They were charged with an embassy to *all nations.* They were to *preach repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus*, and they were to *begin at Jerusalem.**

I. The substance of their commission: "To preach repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus."

Repentance is a term of great latitude. It primarily signifies, *a change of mind:* and this general idea adheres to every form of its application. When the Jew was commanded to *re-*

* This third topic was reserved for a second sermon, which was never written.—Ed.

pent, his whole notions concerning the person and salvation of the Messiah were to undergo a revolution. *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* All his preconceived opinions of the Christ as a temporal deliverer, a magnificent conqueror, by whom his nation was to be rescued from the domination of the Romans, and placed at the head of the whole earth, were to be abandoned.

When the Gentile was commanded to repent, all his ideas concerning the religion of his country, of his ancestors, were to be inverted: *Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanities, and things wherein there is no profit.* Both Jew and Gentile were enjoined to alter entirely the nature of their conceptions of truth and happiness.

What sort of an enterprise was this? Judge, ye who know how difficult it is to root out an ancient prejudice from the mind of man. Who can estimate the sacrifice which it costs his *vanity*? how little, how feeble, how paltry the success of similar attempts, upon *any thing* consecrated by established modes of thinking and feeling. Particularly, how hopeless must the experiment be, when it is directed against men's ideas of national superiority. Their climate and their country the finest in the world! their persons the handsomest, the bravest, the most skilful! their religion the best, the most divine! all their institutions of the highest order! For

example: we are accustomed to applaud ourselves as "the most enlightened people in the universe;" and our institutions, both civil and political, as excelling all others; as perfect, although we are every now and then in the habit of mending, or trying to mend them. Should any one now attempt to reason us out of our prepossessions, to persuade us that the objects of our admiration are in reality detestable, and that we never shall know what decency, and dignity, and pre-eminence mean, until we throw them all away, trample them under foot, and open our ears to a new set of instructions, and our hearts to a new set of perceptions altogether. What reception, suppose ye, would this apostle of revolution meet? How many would he persuade? What other effect could he hope to produce, than to arm the community against him, as an insane man?

Now, then, judge from your own sensations, what the ambassador of the cross had to hope, when attacking opinions and prejudices infinitely stronger than those of civil policy, or political predilections, he preached to men the necessity of changing, radically, their whole convictions of truth and happiness?

Nor is the necessity for such a change less at this moment, nor will it be less while the world endures, than it was at the first promulgation of the gospel. Be not startled at this assertion!

Say not, "The Jews had misunderstood and perverted the scriptures of their own prophets; they were dreaming about a Messiah, such as their vain imaginations had formed him; and to reap any benefit from him, they must be recalled to a sound mind." The Gentiles, again, had lost altogether the knowledge of the true God. They had run into all excess of riot in their madness upon their idols, and must be reclaimed from these vanities to the living and true God. To both Jew and Gentile, therefore, the doctrine and the duty of repentance was strictly applicable; and so it is to these unhappy men, who in the darkness of paganism, are without God. But to us, to Christians, who have imbibed from our infancy those important truths which were new both to Jews and Gentiles, the doctrine of this *repentance* is superfluous. Stay a little, and consider. The effect of Jewish carnality, and pagan idolatry, was to separate between them and their God; to make them forget the end of their being; to drench them in sense; to chain them to this world; and finally, to *drown them in destruction and perdition.* Are we, with all our superior light, with all our commiseration for Jewish blindness and heathen degradation, in no danger of the same sin, and of the same ruin? Are none of our affections estranged from God the sovereign good, and set on lying

vanities which cannot profit? Are not the minds of many called Christians, as far from just ideas concerning the spiritual character and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the grossest and most obstinate Jews? and their hearts as full of *abominable idolatries*, as the most debased and polluted pagan? Deceive not your own selves. The Most High, regards not the form, where he sees the substance of idolatry. You may look with contempt and abhorrence upon a wooden or golden god in the shape of a man, or a *four-footed beast, or a creeping thing*. Is it any thing better, suppose ye, when it has the devotion of all your faculties, the ardor of your whole hearts, your undivided love and worship, in the shape of a dollar, or a guinea, or a bank-note? When the all-seeing glance of God your Maker strikes through the bosoms of this assembly, does he perceive there no perverted principles, no unhallowed emotion, no lust of the flesh, nor lust of the eye, nor pride of life? Cannot he single out any who place their happiness in these things as if they were the chief good? Stand forth, ye idolaters, ye evangelized, and therefore most criminal idolaters, and hear his voice, fresh from the heavens, to you, *Repent*, or perish. Change all your principles, and judgments, or not a man of you shall see the kingdom of God. You may stand high in

the respect of the world, but know ye not that the friendship of this world is enmity with God. If any man, therefore, will be the friend of the world, he must be the enemy of God. And what will ye do, when he shall meet you as a bear robbed of her whelps?

But the repentance which my text enjoins, and the apostles preach, is not merely such an alteration in men's views as amounts to a rational and speculative conviction of truth, of duty, and of happiness. Without this they shall in vain hope to enter the kingdom of God. But this alone will not insure their admittance. You may be, in these matters, as orthodox as the devil, and as far from heaven.

The repentance which is expected from us, goes much deeper, and makes more thorough work. It teaches us to view our errors not merely as *mistakes*, but as *sin;* as having led us just as far towards ruin as we wandered from God. It sinks into the heart, turns it inside out, shows the evils which lurk there, reaches the very source of all our iniquities, the corruption of our nature; makes us sensible that we are unlike the holy God, unmeet for his fellowship, at enmity with him, exposed to the perdition of his frown. If left to its own operation it would be the sorrow of the world, which works melan-

cholly, despair, death. But it is directed by kindlier and holier influence. It creates,

1. Godly sorrow for sin: as against all that is good, and pure, and kind, in the Infinite One; against all his authority, all his patience, all his grace. That our hearts should be a fountain, and our lives a channel, of such floods of ingratitude, filth, rebellion, fill us with dismay, and the most unfeigned compunction.

2. It fills with hatred of our sins. Hatred, as those things which have dishonored the majesty in the heavens, and have rendered us accomplices in treason, with the spirits of the pit—hatred as at those things which have abused the divine mercies, despised the divine judgments, caused our Lord Jesus Christ to shed his most precious blood—hatred as being emphatically the destroyers of soul, of body, of hope: which made the devil, which kindled hell, and will consign to its untold wo all over whom they reign.

3. This repentance leads to a *confession* of sin; deep, humble, unaffected. No apologies, no extenuations. *Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee; if thou Lord should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand—God be merciful to me, a sinner*, is the language of a broken, a contrite, a repenting heart.

4. This repentance involves a forsaking of sin and return to God. It is he who forsakes, not

who conceals his sin, that shall find mercy. The true penitent forsakes his sin wholly and universally. He makes no reserve for a favorite lust. Compromise is out of the question. Is it not a little one? will never be heard from his lips. Whatever he discovers to be provoking to the eyes of the Lord's glory will be renounced. If it be a right arm, a right eye, dear as one's own soul, it must be cast away; it must be nailed to the cross and there left to die as our Lord died, a lingering, painful, shameful, accursed death.

Finally. It is a divorce, not a temporary separation, that he seeks. Whatever constituted sin's claim to dwell with him or rule over him, that must be extinguished. Never more shall his former lusts in his ignorance find a welcome in his bosom. It is henceforth consecrated as a temple of God, and contains no room, no not so much as a corner, for allowed retreat to his enemy. The expelled devil returns not to his house with seven spirits more wicked than himself. The voice of the Son of God, *I charge thee come out of the man and enter no more into him*, is peremptory, and Satan must obey.

What a marvelous revolution is here! The man's views, principles, habits, changed! Views, principles, habits, which had grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength!—to

which he was strongly attached as his nature would permit!—in accordance with which he not long ago sought his happiness! which he judged to be as firm as truth itself! All changed! Radically changed! Changed so as to hate what he loved and to love what he hated! By what process of reason was it effected? What motives enforced, what efficiency insured it?

Marvel not, my brethren! The secret is very simple, but its energy is all divine. The text contains it. The apostles succeeded; the gospel now so succeeds, by coupling with the doctrine of repentance that of the "remission of sin."

That men are sinners conscience dictates, but her dictates are dark, ill-boding, full of fears, and undefined terrors. Hence all her suggestions are melancholy, sour, sullen, very apt to breed superstition, but of cheerful religion absolutely barren. Of forgiveness she knows nothing. This is the blessed discovery of the gospel; and plain as it appears to us, because the gospel hath put it in meridian light and glory, it would have confounded the angels of heaven to all eternity had they been asked whether there is forgiveness with God. It is one of his deep things which he hath revealed unto us by his Spirit. All we know or can

know of it is from this revelation. Let us then inquire at the mouth of the Lord himself what is that forgiveness which he bestows and which he commanded his apostles to preach.

1. It is forgiveness or remission of *sin*, in which term we comprehend every offense of which God is the object. Now of this he alone is the proper judge. Its thanklessness, its malignity, the height, and length, and breadth, and depth, of its evil, the Infinite Mind only can measure. A creature can see and feel it chiefly in the penalty which God has annexed to it; and therefore a part only, and but a small part, can come at once under his observation. To the Eternal Mind, its hideousness and its horrors, from its first introduction through everlasting ages, are all minutely and exactly present. Now that he should be the only being in his own universe who should have thoughts of pardon! How good, how kind, how gracious! What an emphasis does it impart to his name! *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, slow to anger, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.* Verily, it sprang up in the bosom of his own love. Heaven would not have had the compassion, nor hell the impudence, to sue for our pardon. God *alone* shall be exalted in this matter, God alone is the *forgiver*. Let his great name have all the glory!

2. That remission of sin which the gospel proclaims is most *free;* it is forgiveness according to the *riches* of his grace. There is indeed something gratuitous in the very idea of forgiveness. It supposes in the forgiver the right of exacting his due, and of his waiving that right with respect to the person of the offender. Of course he must receive it as a free, unconditional gift. How could it come to us in any other way? Who among the sons of men, that rightly considers the case, can have the hardihood to talk or think of *compounding* with his God? Whose mind is so profane as to insult him with the offer of his best deeds as a price for his favor? You might as well imagine that the gift of God can be purchased with money. Your good deeds, your virtues, your penitence! How much will they cover of the ground of your transgressions? Large and respectable as they may appear in your partial eye, what figure shall they make before him *whose eyes are as a flame of fire?* What but extort from your astonished lips that exceeding great and bitter cry, *We are all as an unclean thing, and our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags.* Yet here is the main difficulty with an awakened conscience: first, to persuade of the fact that there *is* forgiveness with God; next, to persuade it, his forgiveness is absolutely *free.* No point do the scrip-

tures labor more—none do they set in a greater variety of lights—none exhibit in more various attitudes. They display—O let me speak of it with all reverence, for I have no other word!—they display the *anxiety* of the Holy One, for what? Why, that sinful man may believe that he is merciful, and that his mercy is infinitely free! *Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel? Turn, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you, for I am gracious! Ho! every one that thirsteth, come to the waters!* Come poor, come wretched; come with nothing to recommend, with every thing to disqualify you; only come, and take the water of life *freely.*

3. The remission of sin is *full.* The covering is sufficient to wrap yourselves in, the bed is long enough for you to repose yourselves upon. He takes praise to himself that when he forgives, it is of *all trespasses*, and your gladdened hearts should re-echo the praise, *Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me bless his holy name;* who forgiveth *all* thine iniquities! God is as really God in his forgiveness as in his vengeance. He will no more be compared with the children of men, with the sons of the mighty, in his grace, than in his severity. So indeed it must be if ever you enjoy the comfort of pardoned sin; for if the divine forgiveness do not com-

pletely cover the whole ground of our transgressions—if it leave but one sin, original or actual, out of its provision—we have that one sin to answer for, and so no flesh should be saved. This one sin would be our unsheltered, our vulnerable point, in which guilt would thrust in his mortal dart. Oh! it is our strong consolation, that when God forgives he forgives like God. *When he pardons he will abundantly pardon.* Go with your half-forgiveness, limited, conditional pardons, with reserves and limitations, unto the souls of men. It may be, it may become them—it is like themselves. That of God is absolute and perfect, before which our sins are as a cloud before the east wind and the rising sun. Hence he is said to do this work with his whole heart and his whole soul—χαριζεσθαι, freely, bountifully, largely, to indulge and forgive unto us our sins, and to cast them into the bottom of the sea, (Mic. vii. 19.) into the bottomless ocean, an emblem of infinite mercy. Remember this, poor souls, when you are to deal with God in this matter.*

4. The forgiveness of sins is final. In the justification of a sinner, God, the gracious one, pardons once for all—pardons forever! Pardon would be of no use to us, were it not irreversi-

* Owen's 130 Psalm, p. 240, oct. Glasgow.

ble: it would no sooner be gained, than lost. The Lord doth not so deal with his pardoned ones; give them just to taste the sweetness of his mercy, that their own sinfulness may the next moment fill their mouths with the bitterness, and their hearts with the horrors of the curse. His bounty is of another order altogether. His gifts and his calling are without repentance, i. e. unchangeable. His love is everlasting, and so is the life which he bestows upon them. They are united with his dear Son; their lives entwine with his life. Whatever reaches them to destroy them, must first kill their Redeemer. *Because I live*, is his gracious promise, *ye shall live also.* They are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation; therefore they shall never perish. There is, there can be, no condemnation for them—they shall have everlasting life.

NON-CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.

SERMON VIII.

NON-CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.

ROMANS XII. 2.

Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

Many of my hearers will take instant alarm from the uncourtly and unfashionable language of the text. They will assume, as granted, that they are to be lectured away from society, shut out from all the innocent and joyous freedoms of life, and persuaded to spend their days in the recesses of a nunnery, or the cells of a cloister.

But softly: there are no nunneries nor cloisters in the Bible; there are scarcely any in our country, and if there were ever so many, it would be rather hopeless to try the experiment of making converts of either sex from among this audience. Take heed, however, that your prejudices do not assail the word of your God: that you stop not your ears, and steel not your hearts, against his counsels. You are here in his presence, and it may cost you your souls, if you turn away from his admonition. It cannot indeed be denied, that his commandment and the principles of his children are infinitely at variance with a multitude of things which the world calls harmless; nor that it may appear to be your duty, your bounden, your imperative duty, to make a secession, even from the innocencies of the world, to take a firm stand, and to make a full stop, in a career plausible, popular, reputable, for which many ingenious things may be pleaded, but which are not fit for a Christian who is not of the world, but whom Christ hath *called out of the world;* let it be sulky, or cold, or abusive, as it pleases, and that without infringing at all upon your active duties, or upon your allowed, which are your greatest social comforts. Your souls are too precious to compliment away to your giddy neighbors, and eternal life too infinitely valuable to be put in jeopardy by your desire to

please them. Then let us see what the apostle means by being *not conformed to this world*—what is *that transformation by the renewing of our mind*, so zealously pressed upon us—and what is the connection under which he has placed it—*that ye may know what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.*

I. Let us look at the nature of that *non-conformity to this world*, which the text enjoins.

This world emits a bad savor in the records of God. Wherein, in trespasses and sins, says the apostle, *ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.* The course of this world, then, is directed by the prince of darkness; and in directing it, he employs all the faculties of their souls, and all the members of their bodies, *as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.* The world is at this moment full of demoniacs: the evil one takes as complete possession of their persons, and abuses them to as ignoble purposes, as ever he did their bodies in the days of our Lord's humiliation—O that men who are estranged from God, would *believe* the terrifying truth! Yes, in that fair, and gentle, and courteous, and polished form, dwells the spirit that organizes all the rebellion against God, all the misery of man; all that he fears, and has reason to fear;

and causes that lake of *fire and brimstone*, into which his intention is to plunge his votaries. Do you wonder, then, that the scripture has said, *whoever will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of God.* Under his evil control, the world, like a rebellious province, has set up for itself: and acts as if it were perfectly independent of the divine government. It has its own institutions, statutes, and customs—its own pursuits—its own ethics—its own penal code, and its own recompenses. It covers the very same ground which is covered by the law of God; but is, of course, perfectly hostile and contradictory both to the law and the Lawgiver. Here, then, is the cause and origin of all those injunctions of the scriptures, concerning our non-conformity to the world. It is in necessary and perpetual collision with the authority of our rightful Sovereign. Obedience to the one infallibly excludes obedience to the other. And it is most idle and ridiculous to attempt their conciliation: the very attempt proves its author to be an enemy to God, and a slave to the usurper.

The case, my friends, admits but of one alternative: you must either take your part with the world, and share in its guilt and condemnation, or you must *come out from the world and be separate*, i. e. you must be Christians wholly or not at all. No middle character can be allowed. If

you are not *for* the Savior, you must be *against* him. If you do not *gather with him* you must be numbered among those *who scatter abroad.* Neither the kingdom of heaven nor the kingdom of hell tolerates a neutral character. *If Jehovah be God, follow him; and if Baal be God, follow him.* But to halt between two opinions marks the feebleness of present indecision, and will only conduct to future ruin.

Yet it is not from all intercourse with the world that lieth in wickedness that the authority of Jesus Christ prohibits you. For then, as saith the apostle, *ye must needs go out of the world.* But in your separation from it you must show a character which the world never forms and cannot understand; must show that while you are *in* it you are not *of* it—that you do not *love* it—that your commerce with it is of pure *necessity,* and that you are going rapidly as time can carry you to that glorious home, where it shall never more show its face. You must be separated from and have no communion with those things which distinguish the world from the redeemed of the Lord, and which qualify you for the career of that graceless society whose *steps take hold on hell, leading down to the chambers of death.*

1. There must be a renunciation of the *maxims* of the world.

These maxims without exception centre in the creature, and are bounded by time. There is not one of them which regards an immortal destiny. *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*, is the sum of its philosophy. And were it true—did the spirit of a man, like that of a beast, go downward—there is nothing to arraign its wisdom nor to demonstrate the prudence of a very different course. But if on the contrary we are immortal beings, than which nothing can be more certain, then to have all our principles of action shaped only to the requisitions of a mortal life is the extreme of folly and madness; and the farther we can be from so great a delusion, the better for us. Now for example:

It is one of the maxims of the world, that if we are virtuous, i. e. if we render to every man his due, cultivate the mild and beneficent affections, do good actions, and are free from gross iniquities, it is enough. No more will be required of us by God himself, and we may sit down at our ease in the calm and undisturbed hope of unquestioned bliss.

Brethren, let me deal very plainly with you on this point, for it is in reality the rock on which a great portion of men make shipwreck of their souls; and I would observe, that it confines all your accountability to the second table

of the law, leaving the first, all your duties and your relations to God, unprovided for. Who knows not that amiable and beneficent tempers are an essential part of the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ? But who knows not that, separated from the connection under which his word has placed them, torn asunder from supreme love to God from which he has made them to spring, they are at best but a milder form of rebellion against him? How often must you be reminded that mutual acts of kindness, the various good offices of life, are simply necessary to the existence of society among rebels, and that the man who may be most distinguished for them, may himself be the most obnoxious rebel among the whole, and may be condemned for abetting and encouraging others in their rebellion? Was such a plea ever of any value before the tribunals of men? Has it not appeared that the most humane, beneficent, and even righteous among a band of transgressors, was himself a principal culprit? And did the abuse of these good qualities in the service of rebellion for one moment arrest the most condign punishment? And shall we impute to the perfect government of God a blunder which cannot find a place among the imperfect governments of men? Besides, what becomes of the rights of God your Maker? Where is the obedience to the first and

greatest commandment, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind?* Is this to be trodden under foot with impunity? Are you to go all your lives long forgetful of the infinite good, and when called to account escape under the pretext that you were kind to rebels like yourself? Never to bestow a thought upon the eternal world, and to step as a matter of course into all its blessedness? Never to have any concern about glorifying God here, and to be taken up from the mire of your pollutions unpardoned, unwashed, unsanctified, into the full possession of his glory hereafter? O more than sottish! Who hath bewitched you, children of men? And do I not speak to many, who, with the gospel of salvation freely and fully proclaimed in their hearing, have yet no other hope of divine acceptance than this absurd and stupid lie? Believe not the world. Her theology is not for sinful man. To behave decently on earth is no passport for heaven. It may do well enough among the blind and clumsy judges here, but will infallibly be detected by the keen-eyed righteousness beyond the grave. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh;* but *except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* Hope for no change, for no mitigation. If the Lord Christ speaks true, you

shall find, when there is no rectifying mistakes, that every man of you who has all that the world pronounces enough, and has no more, will be forever shut out from the kingdom of God.

2. Where the world cannot succeed in expelling *religious* sensibility altogether, there is another maxim calculated to neutralize its power and render it ineffectual: "You need not be so strict; this great precision only does harm; it makes religion unamiable and yourselves odious. Why cannot you enjoy in moderation and with dignity the innocent freedoms which form the zest of society, and not put on that sombre air and keep at so chilling a distance from all the relish of life?"

In this way do men contrive to make void the law of God by their manner of representation. To fear God and do his will is "strictness" and "hurtful precision." To preserve tenderness of conscience is to be "unamiable and odious." To follow the multitude is to "enjoy with moderation and dignity only innocent freedoms;" and to avoid all appearance of evil is to have "a sombre air and to keep at a chilling distance from the relish of life." So they wrap it up. To make short work of all these fair words and false pretenses, do those who use them really love the law of God? and is it only against extravagant and fanatical excesses that they set

their faces? Or is their opposition in very deed pointed at all that *holiness without which no man shall see the Lord?* Is it not precisely the image of God which they cannot endure, and his authority which they would gladly set aside? Would they not rob you of all the comforts of a good concience? of all the sweets of a peaceful walk with God? and persuade you to exchange them for the giddy whirl, for the idiot laugh, for the midnight debauch, and whatever belongs to that mental and bodily dissipation which *is like the crackling of thorns under a pot*, noisy for a moment and gone forever? Among the other things which form the "zest of society," you must pollute your conscience, corrupt your morals, and dishonor *the glorious and fearful name of the Lord your God* by a little "innocent" gambling. You must also participate in that rational and elegant amusement which the abandoned and thieves select for their special entertainment, the play-house—all, lest your religion should appear unamiable. Were the Lord Jesus now on earth, should he not pass with our fashionable judges as morose, petulant, impertinent, a perfect stranger to polished manners, an enemy to all the cheerfulness and the graces of life? His apostle Paul would be derided as a fanatic, and John, the beloved disciple, would be pitied as a well-meaning enthusiast, endura-

ble only because he was weak. In short, my friends, if you mean to be Christians, you *must walk as Christ also walked.* Your ears must be deaf alike to the open enmity and the hollow friendship of the world. You must have nothing to do with their plausible maxims—parleying is half a surrender. You must put down your foot decisively in the King's highway, the way of holiness, in which *the elders obtained a good report*, and which is your short and only way to the kingdom.

3. When guilt, who pays no regard to etiquet, bursts in upon the conscience, raises his rugged voice, and reads his fearful lectures, the world has another maxim to soothe him down and to keep all quiet within: "God is a merciful God; we injure his name by ascribing harshness and rigor to him. He pities his poor feeble creatures, compassionates their infirmities, takes delight in forgiving their faults, and will not be extreme to mark what is amiss."

How false and foul a conclusion, coupled with the most blessed truth that can sound in the ears of an awakened sinner! He is merciful. The dimensions of his mercy, its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, it is not for the creature to scan. The gospel alone however has revealed it in all its magnitude and freedom. But it is not to that mercy as thus revealed that

the world appeals. Jesus Christ and his merit and grace find no place among its maxims. The creed of the world and that of the Unitarians are perfectly agreed. Shut out the Savior—make no use whatever of him as *the way and the truth and the life*—know nothing, believe nothing, say nothing, of that *new and living way which he hath consecrated by his blood*—and all the rebels together will be loud in their praises of the divine mercy. But all this cry about the mercy of God is to encourage sinners who continue in their sins. It has nothing in common with the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who saves his people *from* their sins, It creates a deceitful hope, a lying persuasion, that a man may live habitually neglectful of God, of his immortal soul, of his eternal interests, and after all have a just confidence in the divine mercy. Believe it not—shut your ears against so popular and fatal a delusion. It is not he who palliates, but he who confesses and forsakes his sins—he who turns from them wholly, impartially, forever, and turns his feet unto God's testimonies—that shall find mercy. Have as much as you please of this divinity of the world. It is reprobate silver; it will never make you rich unto everlasting life, nor buy one shred of clothing to cover your nakedness. The *blood of Jesus must cleanse you from all sin;* the righteousness

of Jesus must be your spotless robe; the Spirit of Jesus must be your sanctifier; or in that great and terrible day of the Lord you have nothing to look for but to *be condemned with the world.*

2. To renounce in words the maxims of the world, will be of little avail, if we do not also renounce its practices.

The world has a method of forming a conscience of its own, and a moral law to correspond with it: so that whoever observes this law, however he may disregard and insult the law of God, is to be respected as a correct and honorable man. For example,

You may spend a life in utter forgetfulness of God and his worship—in the most positive unbelief, and the most marked contempt of our Lord Jesus Christ—in habitual and even studious neglect of his great salvation, and every thing referring to its existence, and you never break the chain of your harmony with the world. These things give no uneasiness to a worldly conscience, nor disqualify you in the least for worldly honor and confidence. Nay, more: you may convert the sabbath-day, the day which the Lord emphatically calls his own, into a season for secular business, or carnal amusement—you may even profane the name of the Lord your God—you may bestow your highest affections

upon as many idols as you can find places for in your heart—it breaks no scores with a worldly conscience, nor depreciates you in the least in the eyes of worldly men. If you live in a commercial country, you may defraud the government of its just dues—may make false entries of your goods. If your country be neutral, may furnish forged papers for your vessel, to suit either belligerent as circumstances shall require—may crown the whole with some *hard swearing*, which old-fashioned men call *perjury* —you may break, as it is termed, may convey your property fraudulently out of the reach of its true owners—may bring multitudes of the poor, the widowed, and the fatherless, who trusted in your integrity, to the extreme of wretchedness—and when you have secured a human acquittal, by laws perhaps not a whit more righteous than your own principles, may erect your crest, may turn round and look full in the face the very persons you have ruined; may insult them with the ostentatious display of your wealth, and receive not a hat the less. If you have spirit to carry the matter so high, you may disturb domestic peace, and then blow out the brains of the injured, for breathing upon your *honor;* the skirts of the world's conscience are very large, and its bowels of charity very strong, for all who side with it against the puritanical

practices of *fearing God and keeping his commandments.* But now hear a moment what He who is to be your Judge hath said. *Be not deceived: Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor theives, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* His law is made, and its penalty enacted, *for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for liars, for perjured persons, for murderers, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.* He has said that the *wicked*, whoever they be, by whatever names they go, and under whatever sanctions they may shield themselves, *shall be turned into* HELL; if you mean to take up your bed there, and to know, by awful experience, what it is to *dwell with everlasting burnings*, why then, go, *be conformed to this world*, and divide its recompense. But if not, if you are set for another course, and for another issue, if you design to meet the Lord in the air, when all that belongs to the world will be poor and contemptible enough, then see, in the

II. Place, the necessity of the transformation mentioned in the text. *Be ye transformed in the renewing of your mind.*

Your speculative opinions, and your practical judgments, on those vital questions which affect

your relations to God, and the salvation of your soul, must be exactly the reverse of the maxims and habits of this world. You must change sides: do it effectually, decidedly, visibly. You are to inquire, not what is fashionable, but what is right—not what is reputable or passable among men, but what the Lord God hath spoken—you must in a particular manner come out for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the truth which is according to godliness. Let me address a word to those who are sensible of their duty, and yet shrink from the performance of it. *How long halt ye between two opinions?* If your opinion is fixed on the great matters of your eternal hope, of what are you ashamed or afraid. Smothered regard our Captain disdains. Do not imagine that if you are really his disciples ye can escape detection by the world, or that it will spare you the more, or hate you the less. Wo be unto you, if it should! Are you afraid, when you look around you and observe the mighty difference between the character of professing Christians, and the requisitions of your Divine Master, that you too, will one day fall back, and bring a blot upon that *worthy name whereby ye are called?* It is a salutary fear; but may be worked up into a grievous temptation. It should inspire caution; not keep among the ranks of unbelievers, and

apparently in the interests of enmity against God. To omit the plain duty of leaving the world that lieth in wickedness, is not the way to find freedom or peace. Cast your fears of falling upon him who has said, *my grace is sufficient for thee;* start from your lethargy, and *run with patience the race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.*

And let these careless professors, whose lives lay a stumbling block before their more conscientious brethren, suffer the word of reproof and exhortation. You are justly liable to part of that same rebuke which our Lord gave to the Jewish lawyer; not indeed *for taking away the key of knowledge*, but to the other and severer part of his charge; you *go not into the kingdom of heaven yourselves, and them that would enter in, ye hinder.* Is it not enough to dishonor the Savior under the pretense of being his friends, but must you keep back others from honoring him? Are ye not satisfied with perishing alone —must you strive to make your neighbors bear your company? Is the taste of their blood sweet to you; or will it be pleasant to sink down to death under the weight of their ruin, superadded to your own? rather seek to encourage them; to cheer their drooping hopes; to revive their fainting spirits; to *strengthen the*

hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. O how delightful to enter the palaces above, with a friend on either side! To hear a saved one, whom perhaps you never knew, acknowledge, if it had not been for this man's firmness, for that woman's tenderness, for yonder person's fidelity, I had perhaps missed my road, been led astray in the paths of the seducer, and had never been here? Think you that such things will not add to the lustre of your crown, to the intensity of your bliss, to the beauty of your heaven? As you value all the three, be persuaded by a close imitation of Jesus Christ, to help, and not to hinder others in the prosecution of their high calling.

This transformation must be by the *renewing of your mind.* Outward things alone will not do. *Bodily exercise profiteth little.* The resolution must be radical, and within the soul. That Holy Spirit, who is the vicegerent of Jesus Christ, must apply his power to create men anew; or after all their reformation, their hearts will be still hankering after *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.* Trifle not with eternal things. Never imagine that what man can see and understand is enough. Though if you have not what he can see and

understand, there is a fatal deficiency. *Your light must so shine before men, that others, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.* But in order to effect so divine a result, *marvel not* if we perpetually ring in your ears that proclamation of the Master, *Ye must be born again!* Your faculties must be turned away from the objects of sinful pursuit, to the will and the work of your reconciled God and heavenly Father. Like the great High Priest of your profession, you must *delight to do the will of God.* Your affections too must be changed, and must change their objects. *If ye then, be risen with Christ,* to a new and holy life, *seek those things which are above, where he himself sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* In fine, this *renewing of your mind* will make you *spiritually minded, which is life and peace.*

III. The connection under which this nonconformity to the world is placed in the text demands your serious attention: *That ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

So long as men live conformably *to the course of this world,* they labor under an incapacity, criminal indeed, but still an incapacity, of clearly

perceiving what the will of God is, and especially that it is good and acceptable and perfect. The motives which govern them, the influences which act upon them, the objects of their preference, all conspire to draw a thick film over their moral vision. So that the most conclusive scriptural demonstrations do not operate with their proper force, nor can the strongest scriptural light make their way plain before their face. They still grope in the dark, and though *the light shineth in darkness, the darkness comprehendeth it not.* They still profess their honesty, avow themselves sincere inquirers after truth, and wonder that they come no nearer to a satisfying conclusion; or perhaps they do come to a conclusion, and equally wonder to find all the plain simple-hearted Christians in the world are against them. I have only to say, that one beam of the glory of God in Christ Jesus darting into their minds, will instantly put to flight this boasted honesty, this pretense of sincere inquiry, and make them see and own the inconceivable deceitfulness of their own hearts. Under the power of his renewing grace their vision is purified. The images which it forms are in their proper place and position. Obscurities are enlightened, entanglements are unraveled, doubts resolved, and the wonder now is at the former blindness. The words of God have an evidence

and an efficacy altogether surprising. The will of God there is no difficulty, generally speaking, of determining with the greatest precision; particularly all that revealed will which affects the substance of our faith, our duty, and our hope. They who believe his testimony the most firmly, receiving it upon his own authority as undisputed and indisputable truth, make the most rapid and eminent progress. They ask no questions but *what said my Lord unto his servant?* and they are enabled to perceive both what he does say and that it is *all good*, and of such a sort as must be *acceptable* when it takes place in them, and precisely that which suits their circumstances and promotes the end for which it was intended, being therefore every way *perfect*. It is just what they themselves would wish it. They have nothing to diminish, to add, nor to alter. They complain, indeed they have reason to complain, often and bitterly, of *sin that dwelleth in them—of the lusting of the flesh against the spirit—of the law in their members warring against the law of their mind, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin and death.* But of the law, of the will of God, not a whisper of complaint—no lamentation about its breadth or strictness—none about its spirituality, *searching even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit.* They know nothing

of what some men call a milder law of grace. They ask for no dispensations, no relaxation. Their unanimous verdict is that God's *commandments are not grievous;* that *the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.* With these views of the divine will, *they go from strength to strength,* their path *being that of the just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

Such, my brethren, is the non-conformity to this world enforced by the text, and such its fruits. Say then if there is not a most lamentable and ruinous difference between what we are and what we should be. Who is there that like Enoch *walks with God?* Who makes it his main study to be *conformed to the image of the first-born?* and inquires, conscientiously, into the state and progress of his conformity? Who *crucifies the old man with his deeds, the flesh with the affections and lusts?* If we were to judge from the appearance, and of professing Christians, we should certainly conclude that it is a part of their duty to be as unlike God and as like the world as possible. Look at their spirit; is it not the spirit of the world?—at their affections; are they not the affections of the world?—at their pursuits; are they not the pursuits of the world?—at their law of morals; is it not the world's law? Have they any better or higher

motive or standard of conduct than the prevailing fashion? Away with evasion! Come to the matter of fact. How do you stand with respect to the law of God?—to the active faith of our Lord Jesus Christ? that faith which purifies the heart and which works by love? Why do you turn pale at the thoughts of death? Why shiver with terror in the prospect of the judgment-seat and the judicial process? To a Christian actively engaged in his vocation, the *appearing of the Great God our Savior* ought to be and is a *blessed hope*. Why does the very idea of it fill you with trepidation? Ah! my dear friends, be assured all is not right. There is something rotten and ruinous in your condition, and must be rectified if you would have a hope that shall not put you to shame. Rouse up, all ye who have any regard for your heavenly Master! Rouse up in his strength! shake off your indolence and the entanglements which enwrap you! Many of you are convinced that to your own peace and to your Redeemer's glory it is necessary that the distance between you and the mere people of the world be greatly widened. Stifle not convictions while you repress the urgencies of duty. Do what the heathen sage advised a young man to do, *dare*—dare to snap your trammels—dare to be singular—dare to *obey God rather than man*. You will

lose nothing either of comfort or of dignity. *The peace of God which passeth all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.* The ministering spirits will descend from on high to help and honor those who honor God. He will himself cast his compassionate and complacent regards upon you, and will abundantly sweeten all the mortifications which may be poured into your cup. Jesus hath said, *Where I am, there shall my servant be also.* The full grace of which promise you shall enjoy in the ecstasy of your hearts when he shall take you to himself to be with him in safety; and you shall see the world with its gods, its glories, and its worshipers, consuming together in the last fire!

THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE.

SERMON IX.

THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE.

JOHN VII. 37.

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.

The blessed Jesus was ever employed in doing good. To save the souls of men was the benevolent purpose for which he came into our world, and which he continually prosecuted during the whole of his ministry. Love to our ruined race prompted him to leave the bosom of his Father, to empty himself of his glory, to become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. With all the tenderness of faultless humanity, he sympathized with even the bodily distresses of those

whom he came to redeem, and lent a willing hand to their relief. But on their spiritual miseries his thoughts were principally set. Of these he saw perfectly the deadly nature and the alarming extent. To these he called perpetually the attention of men; for these he proclaimed himself a sovereign Physician, and offered freely his almighty aid. In this labor of love his life was spent. He omitted no opportunity of exercising it, and the same principle which animated all his kind and gracious actions now leads him to Jerusalem at the feast of tabernacles.

This feast, which God ordained to commemorate the travels of his people in the wilderness, where they dwelt in tents or tabernacles, was one of the three solemn occasions on which all the males of Israel were obliged to appear before God at Jerusalem. Accordingly vast multitudes resorted thither from every part of the land. The city, and especially the temple, was thronged. On the eighth, which was the last and greatest day of the feast, "it was customary for the priests to surround the altar with their palm-branches, and to pour out water in the temple as an expression of the general desire of the Messiah's appearance, and the pouring forth of the Spirit by him." The Redeemer seized this occasion of claiming publicly the honors of

his character and inviting the Jews to faith in his name. He ascends a small eminence from which he might command a view of the people, and be himself both seen and heard. How august the scene! Was there ever such an assembly and such a minister! The incarnate God preaches to the tribes of Israel! How awful and venerable his aspect! What majesty and love beam from his countenance! What grace flows from his lips! Be still every tumult! be hushed every unhallowed passion! be collected all wandering thoughts while the Savior speaks! "Look," says he, "from ordinances to the God of ordinances—from the symbol to the thing signified! Behold in me the accomplishment of the prophetic promise, *The Lord whom ye seek shall come into his temple suddenly, even the Angel of the covenant whom ye delight in.* Are you longing for the Messiah promised to the fathers? I that speak unto you am he. Do your thirsty souls need to be refreshed by the waters of the sanctuary? I am the Fountain of life. *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.*" Happy nation! had they known their privileges when the Lord of the temple was present in the temple and explained his own institutions!

But we must not confine to the Jews the Savior's grace. To all who enjoy the gospel he offers the same invitation. To us he cries, and

we are warned not to turn away from him that speaketh from heaven; to every one of us he cries, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink!*

How rich, how free, how adorable his grace is, will appear from considering the persons invited, and the invitation itself.

I. Let us attend to the persons invited. They are the *thirsty.*

No man can be so senseless as to imagine that the Redeemer speaks of a bodily thirst. He is addressing sinners on the things which belong to their eternal peace, and as that great Prophet whom the Lord God had promised to raise up in the midst of Israel. The meaning of his language must, therefore, correspond with the importance of his object, and the dignity of his character. His words undoubtedly relate to the state of men's souls, and suppose that there is in the minds of those with whom he is dealing, an uneasiness and anxiety analogous to that painful sensation which arises from extreme thirst. The strong terms in which this state of mind is characterized, have induced the current opinion, an opinion adopted indeed, though very negligently, by even great and good men, that the Lord Jesus here invites none but such as are thirsting after an interest in his everlasting righteousness. How many of those who, driven

from every other hope, were endeavoring to fix their trembling eye upon the Redeemer's atonement, have heard, as a sentence denounced in thunder against them, this interpretation of the text! "Alas! I fear that I have not the spiritual thirst which is here required, and am therefore excluded from the gracious warrant," has often been the language of exercised people. These are certainly included, but they may not monopolize the warrant: and in truth they are frequently the first to decline it, as not belonging to them. If the words imply any thing, they imply that those who have never yet drunk of the water of life which is in Christ as in a fountain, may come and drink. But surely, they who have learned the vanity of every portion but a reconciled God—who have learned that it is Christ Jesus alone by whom the reconciliation is effected—who have learned to renounce every refuge of lies, and count all things but loss and dung that they may win Christ, and be found in him, not having their own righteousness, are already quickened by the Spirit of grace and truth; have already been refreshed from the fountain of living waters. While, therefore, the text encourages such to apply continually to the fulness of the Redeemer, let us not restrict its freedom by appropriating it to them alone. Christ does not say, "If any man thirst for

righteousness—for deliverance from the guilt and power of sin—for communion and fellowship with God, let him come unto me, or else let him stay back;" but simply, and in the most unqualified manner, *If any man* THIRST, *let him come unto me and drink.* Is it necessary to prove that there is in mankind, universally, a principle which brings them all within the compass of the gracious offer? The fact is as clear as noonday. They all thirst, and insatiably too, they thirst for happiness. This, indeed, is a propensity congenial to the soul, and coeval with its existence. It was implanted in man when God *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.* It was intended to answer the most exalted end, by leading him perpetually to God, the uncreated source of bliss. When he fell, the propensity remained, but the direction was lost. The moment man left the way of God and duty, he left the way of peace and joy. His understanding is so blinded, that he knows not how to find it again. His strength is so enfeebled that he is unable to re-measure his steps, to re-mount the heights of glory from which he fell—and his will and affections are so depraved, that he is not more unable than unwilling to return. From this sad condition of doubt, disquietude, helplessness and misery, his thirst for happiness impels him to flee. He gropes, he struggles: but

he gropes at midnight. He struggles with obstacles which he can neither remove nor surmount. Bewildered in the dreary mazes of an inextricable labyrinth, without light to cheer, without a clue to guide him, he wanders from creature to creature; and after all his labor, and all his toil, finds himself as far as ever from the object of his wishes. Deplorable situation! He can do nothing but tread the same insipid, lifeless, hopeless track. Fainting with thirst, he can find nothing to revive his drooping spirit, nothing to cool the fever of his tongue. Utterly ignorant of God and his consolations, he knows not where or how to obtain that grace which alone can relieve him from his trouble. But his necessities are not silent. Ten thousand wants lift up their voices, and send their cry to the very heavens. Pitiable, my brethren, is the note of wo: and so importunate was the entreaty of human wretchedness, that the Son of God, out of pure compassion, left the throne of his glory, and clothed himself with mortality, that he might apply a remedy to our otherwise incurable evils, and deliver us from becoming the victims of eternal death. In consequence of what he has done and suffered, he has opened a fountain of living waters, and invites all poor sinners who are perishing with thirst, whether they believe it or not, to come and drink. That

you may be more firmly convinced of this delightful truth, turn to the beginning of the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah's prophecy; and there you will see that a similar invitation is extended to every one who hears the gospel, even though he totally disregards the great salvation it reveals. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk*, the choicest blessings, *without money and without price*, without merit or recommendation. Mark what follows. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not?* Do they who are seeking Christ Jesus, spend their time, and their talents, and their labor, in pursuing vanity? Assuredly not! There cannot be a more exact description of those who seek every thing else but Christ; and therefore he adds, with infinite tenderness, *Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.* And in the same unlimited manner he speaks in the text, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.*

Having seen who are the persons invited, let us now attend,

II. To the invitation itself.

Since human misery was designated by the metaphorical term, *thirst*, the remedy to that

misery is very properly exhibited under the idea of *drinking*. The command of Christ is, therefore, nothing else than a command to receive from him all the happiness our souls can wish. As if he had said, "Miserable men, who are searching for happiness, but have missed the way, expect not from the creature that solid and permanent enjoyment which is to be found in the Creator alone; quit the broken cisterns which can hold no water; come to me; I only am the portion of the immortal soul; my fullness is abundantly adequate to gratify your largest wishes; come, take, taste, drink, and live forever. *He that believeth on me*, as the scripture hath said, *out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*.

Without insisting on a number of remarks which naturally occur on this copious and interesting subject, let us direct our attention to the following important truths, that are plainly inculcated in the text. That Christ Jesus requires perishing men to place their confidence in him only. That his salvation is exactly fitted to their necessities—and that it is freely offered.

1. Christ Jesus requires perishing men to place their confidence in him alone.

It is a principle uniformly taught in the scriptures—a principle which cannot dwell too fre-

quently upon our recollection nor too powerfully affect our hearts—that the great Redeemer is the only hope of sinners, and therefore in this, as well as in every other invitation of the gospel, he keeps out of sight every thing but his glorious self. The new covenant is so constituted, that let men view it in any direction they think proper, the first object which meets their eyes is the divine Head of the covenant; and of all the blessings with which this covenant abounds, though immense in their magnitude, infinite in their number, inestimable in their value, the soul can neither enjoy nor see any till faith not only look but enter through Christ the door. Accordingly, the chief and favorite theme of the gospel is the Lord Jesus. Mark his own invitation in the passage before us. What instructions does he give to poor sinners who are dying with thirst? Does he bid them first to drink as much as they can from the polluted waters they may have in themselves, and if they be not then satisfied, to come to him and supply the deficiency? Or, to strip the text of metaphor, does he bid them to do what they can to obey the divine law, and when they find their righteousness inadequate to answer its high demand, to come to him and receive from his righteousness so much as will make up the defect of their own, and render the compound an oblation

worthy of God's acceptance? No such thing! Christ declares to men their misery; he declares himself their Savior, and not a syllable do we hear of their own righteousness. This indeed is a doctrine very unpalatable to the unrenewed nature, and rouses into opposition all the enmity of the carnal heart. But it is among the first lessons in the divine life, and if we do not effectually learn it, all our other learning is of trifling moment. Little do sinners know the indignity they offer to the Son of God and the injury they do to their own souls by endeavoring to associate themselves with him in the work of their redemption. Brethren, deceive not yourselves. Christ will not give his glory to another. He will not share with you the honor of your salvation. He must have all the praise or he will have none. You must depend entirely on him or entirely on yourselves. Christ is the way and the only way to the Father and to everlasting life. You must be either wholly in this way or wholly out of it. There is no medium. You cannot combine the old and new covenants, and climb to heaven partly by one and partly by the other. If you please yourselves with such an idea, shame and destruction will be the end of your hope. Foolish men! Abandon the vain attempt! You must tear Jehovah from his throne before you succeed. And what do you

intend by this mad behavior? Is not the righteousness of Christ sufficient? Is it not perfect? Is it not spotless? Do you think that this glorious robe cannot beautify, nor cover, nor secure you, unless it be patched with the filthy rags of your own righteousness? If the Lord Jesus will adorn you with his righteousness, you may well part with your own, and you will be infinite gainers by the exchange; for,

2. His salvation is exactly fitted to your necessities.

In forming an estimate of these necessities, we may not credit the report of our own hearts, for they are *deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.* We must appeal from their partial sentence to the judgment of *the law and the testimony.* Now what account does the divine word give of men in a natural state? It represents them as spiritually dead—as covered with defilement and loathsomeness—as far from God and hope—as unfruitful in righteousness, and in consequence of these things like briars and thorns, whose end is to be burned. What eye that looks back upon the original beauty and dignity and bliss of man, and surveys the dread havoc that sin has made, can refuse a tear over the ruins of our pristine glory? What eye that looks around and sees no arm to deliver from these depths of disgrace and wo, will refuse a

flood of tears at the gloomy prospect? But let the sigh of anguish be turned into the shout of joy, for Jesus the deliverer comes, and salvation, complete, everlasting salvation, is in his hand.

He saves from spiritual death. *And you hath he quickened*, says the apostle, *who were dead in trespasses and sins. The hour is coming*, said he to the Jews, *and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.* He sends forth his Holy Spirit and breathes upon the dry bones, and flesh and sinews come upon them, and life enters into them, and they stand up upon their feet. He gives them to drink of the river of the water of life, not merely a temporary draught which may relieve them for a moment and fail them hereafter, but imparts it in such abundance that they never again thirst. He bestows upon them that precious faith which unites them inseparably to himself, and forms a channel through which streams from his fullness flow perpetually into them, and flow so copiously as to send forth from themselves rivers of living water.

Farther, Christ Jesus not only quickens but sanctifies. Sanctification is indispensably necessary to fit us for seeing the Lord, for relishing the employments of heaven. But ah! how polluted is the unrenewed soul! Hear how Jehovah himself describes it: *As for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, nei-*

ther wast thou washed in water to supple thee: neither wast thou salted at all, nor swaddled at all—but thou wast cast out in the open field to the loathing of thy person. (Ezek. xvi. 4, 5.) And there mightest thou have lain and perished forever, had not the Redeemer had compassion upon thee. Yet even from this pollution mayest thou be washed in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. The Lord God has promised to all who credit his testimony respecting his Son, *I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you.* But this purifying water can be obtained only in Christ Jesus. All who are now in glory, without a single exception, *washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* Here too must you be washed or you must die. 'Tis the unchangeable decree of an unchanging God. And be not discouraged. The diseases of the soul, though terrible beyond conception, are not so noisome and inveterate as to baffle the healing energy of this sacred fountain. The blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin, and it can cleanse from yours, though it equaled the united pollutions of all the redeemed who ever lived or shall live hereafter.

By performing in our favor such miracles of mercy, our Almighty Friend restores us to the

divine image and approbation, brings us near to God, and inspires us with the sweet hope of everlasting life. Holiness is the divine image, and God must love what is like himself. True, our highest earthly attainments are stained with many a blot, and cannot abide the severe scrutiny of Him who chargeth his very angels with folly. But personal holiness, though it forms the lineaments of the divine image on the soul, and is our qualification for heaven, is not our title to it. This is the imputed righteousness of our Redeemer. We have nothing to do with God but in Jesus Christ, neither has God as a God of mercy any thing to do with us but in Jesus Christ, and we are complete in him. In his righteousness, and therefore in his people's righteousness, not even Jehovah's eye can discern a blemish. Thus, in receiving him by faith, we who once were afar off are brought nigh by the blood of his cross—nigh in the acceptance of our persons with God—nigh to him as a reconciled Father—nigh in fellowship and communion with him. We have boldness and confidence in approaching his throne of grace, for every step in our way to the mercy-seat is sprinkled with the blood of our great Paschal Lamb; and shielded by the faithfulness of him who cannot lie, we are perfectly safe from the blow of the destroying angel. Tell me, ye who

are strangers to the Savior, how do you expect to obtain access to the living God? Lay the word of truth before you—lay your hands upon your hearts—listen to the monitor within, and say, is not the plan which brings you near by Christ Jesus a glorious plan? Children of deception, who look for this privilege from any other quarter, be assured that if God is true, your *hope shall be as the spider's web*, and your *confidence shall lead you to the king of terrors.*

But to those who trust in his merit and grace, the kindness of our great High Priest goes still farther. He does not only quicken and sanctify their souls and bring them near to God, he also frees them from the reproach of unfruitfulness.

The human heart is naturally a dry, a barren, a rocky soil—not one heavenly temper, not one good disposition, can flourish there. All the graces of the divine life are plants of foreign growth. They are rooted in the soul *by* none but Jehovah the Spirit, and *in* none but those whom he savingly unites to the Lord Jesus. Here again we see the fitness of Christ's salvation to our wants. Is there present a sinner whose heart is so hard and barren that not one holy thought can spring from it? Thus runs the rich promise, *I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing*

upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, and as willows by the water-courses. (Is. xliv. 3, 4.) Let the heart be hard, let it be stubborn and impenetrable as the flint, the streams which issue from the fountain opened for the house of David pierce and soften and fructify the most unyielding and barren soil. Then faith and all the kindred graces strike deep their roots, spread wide their branches, unfold their blossoms, diffuse their fragrance, and bear much fruit to the glory of God. Nor is this an honor and a happiness of short duration. The righteous do not resemble those plants of rapid growth which start almost immediately from the seed into maturity, and as quickly fade and die. They are like the palm-tree, stately, majestic, permanent—like trees planted by the rivers of water which bring forth their fruit in their season, and whose leaf doth not wither. Thus they continue, ripening by grace for glory, till Christ transplant them into the paradise of God. Here, therefore, let me introduce the last remark on the fitness of his salvation.

It was observed, that in consequence of their guilt, their pollution, their distance from God, and their unfruitfulness, sinners are like briers and thorns, whose end is to be burned. Dreadful idea! *Who can dwell with devouring flames? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?* This

is all we can expect on our own account, yet from this tremendous fate the salvation of Christ, and that alone, can deliver us. The moment we draw the breath of life, the curse of a violated law seizes and binds us with chains too strong for the might of all the angels in heaven, and reserves us as criminals for the day of slaughter. But our great Redeemer bursts these chains, looses this iron grasp, sets the captives at liberty, and puts into their mouths a song of triumph. Faith in his precious atonement is not only connected with the important blessings that have been mentioned, but secures to their happy possessors an unfailing title to eternal joy. For by this faith we have *our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.* Christ cannot disappoint the hope of them who trust in him, and he hath said, *whosoever believeth on me hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day. Who then shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Shall God that justifieth? Who is he that condemneth? Is it Christ that died? Yea rather that is risen again, who also sitteth at the right hand of God.* Reprobate the suspicion, and be persuaded, that *neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate believers from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Adorable salvation! Who would not wish to partake of it? Who would not exult in the faintest dawn of hope that they *may* partake of it? "But what shall we give, what shall we do, to purchase an interest in it?" Give! Do! Misguided men! Nothing. It is not only treasured up in Christ Jesus—it is not only adapted in the most glorious fitness to all your wants, but in the

3d. Place, It is *free*, absolutely free. And bless God that it is so. Did it require any thing to be merited on our part, we might bid an eternal adieu to heaven and happiness. The salvation of Christ cannot be deserved. Infinitely precious, its value surpasses all desert. Every thing about it is infinite. It saves from infinite guilt, infinite pollution, infinite wrath, and infinite wretchedness. It confers on all who enjoy it, infinite dignity, and infinite bliss. All the works of all sinful men, from the beginning to the end of time, could not merit the smallest portion of it. The best services of the unregenerate are iniquity, and deserve to *be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* If you are resolved to merit at the hand of God, you shall get, indeed, what you merit; but it will be in hell. The new covenant has no conditions to be performed by us. These were ful-

filled by Christ the Mediator. It is, therefore, to us a covenant of grace. But if you think that you must merit something to put you in possession of its blessings, you change its very nature—you transform it immediately into a covenant of works, and then, as the apostle says, *grace is no more grace.* "But must we not repent before we may come to Christ?" No! you can never repent as you ought, till you be interested in his love, and influenced by his Spirit. The tears of true repentance flow from the eye of faith. *They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and shall mourn.*

"Are we, then, to be furnished with no qualifications that may fit us for receiving the gospel salvation?" None but the utter want of every good quality. Christ Jesus *came not to call the righteous;* he did not expect to find men so; he expected to find them *altogether filthy,* and therefore he came to call *sinners to repentance.* Tell me, ye who strive to wed the covenant of works with the grace of the gospel, if a man were lying, panting, fainting, dying with thirst, so feeble that he could not move a limb to help himself, and if some kind friend were to carry him to a pure and wholesome stream, and to put the water to his lips, would he merit any thing by drinking it? 'Tis just so, brethren, with the salvation of Christ. Unconnected with

him you must perish! And you are so far from being able to do any thing to merit an interest in the blessings of his purchase, that you cannot perform a single action which will be honored with the approbation of God, till you drink of the water of life, and your souls be invigorated by its quickening efficacy.

These, my friends, are important truths; and in bringing them by a close application home to your own consciences, the first question that occurs is, Have you drunk of these living waters which are in Christ Jesus? Too many of you, I fear, if they will act honestly, must reply, that till this hour they have never tasted them. With such of you, my brethren, I have some weighty business. God sent you into this world to glorify him; and as you are sinners, he requires you to glorify him by believing the record he has given of his Son, and securing your happiness by thus obeying his will. Has this been your employment? Far, very far from it. You have been seeking happiness, indeed, with the most unwearied perseverance. But have you found it? Your conduct declares that you have not. Why else, ye young, ye giddy, and ye gay, why this perpetual round of amusement and vanity? Why do ye run from one enjoyment to another, and studiously avoid conversing with yourselves? Why labor to outstrip, in a race of

folly, the close pursuit of a vexing conscience? Why endeavor to banish from your minds every settled thought about an eternal world? Is it not because that world wears a gloomy appearance, because all beyond the grave is dreary and cheerless? Ye young, ye giddy, and ye gay, be faithful to yourselves. Lay your hands upon your hearts, and own the truth. Have you not sometimes felt in your own souls, a vacuum which all your amusements could not fill? Has it not sometimes happened, even in your most heedless moments, that reflection, an unbidden and unwelcome guest, has stolen into your bosoms, and whispered the alarming suggestion, that all is not right? Is it not this which makes the idea of God, eternity, heaven, and hell, to trouble you? Is it not this which sheds a freezing terror through your souls? Or are you so benumbed as never to be conscious of such emotions? God grant that you may awaken from this deadly sleep before you open your eyes in that place of torment where the Lord hath forgotten to be gracious, and where his tender mercies are shut up in his wrath.

And you, who, more advanced in years, are sick of the frolic of youth, and plunge with ardor into the busy scenes of active life, has happiness taken up her abode in your breasts? If strangers to the Redeemer, you cannot say so.

Why else strive to join house to house and field to field? Why form plan after plan and scheme after scheme to augment your wealth and honors and grandeur in the hope of more complete and contented enjoyment? Why be so dejected at the failure of your projects, or at the other ills of life, and seek in the gratification of sense relief from the gnawings of an anxious mind? Your acknowledgment may not correspond with the language of the fact, but the fact speaks truly and declares plainly that the acquisitions of manhood are as unable to satisfy the soul as the trifles of early days. Do not pretend that you labor only for future days, nor flatter yourselves with the expectation of spending quietly and peaceably and happily the evening of your age. To old age be our appeal. Say, hoary sinner, who hast passed through youth and riper years, and approached the confines of eternity, where is thy happiness? The turbulence of passion may have subsided—the vexations of active business may be over—and in these respects you may possess a tranquillity. But if the turbulence of passion has subsided, if the vexations of active business are over, the capacity of enjoyment is also gone. State, then, fairly, both sides of the question, and you will find that you have nothing left. What now strengthens the feeble knees and lifts up the

hands that hang down? When the grasshopper is become a burden—when the shadows of the night grow large and long—when the sprightliness of youth has vanished and the vigor of manhood failed—when the king of terrors lifts his unerring arm and threatens to strike the blow which will shatter to atoms thy clay tabernacle, and hurry its lingering inhabitant to the tribunal of God—what revives the fainting spirit? The streams of earthly consolation are already dried up, and wilt thou yet hug to thy bosom, with unavailing fondness, the wretched remnants of its fleeting joy? "O more than sottish!" Be persuaded, all of you, who are unacquainted with the gospel, to abandon the hope of finding happiness in created comforts. You are perpetually disappointed, and yet continue to deceive yourselves by imagining that if you miss your object here, you will meet it yonder. But when you arrive at the longed-for spot, the airy phantom eludes your embrace and mocks your hope. But do not blame the creature, nor think I mean to blame it. The creature is your friend. The creature bears a testimony for God. Eternal truth has told you, that nothing below can be a suitable portion for the immortal soul; and that when you betake yourselves to the creature in this view, you flee to *a refuge of lies.* All the creatures re-echo the important moni-

tion, and loudly cry, *It is not in us!* Quit then, quit immediately these *broken cisterns which can hold no water.* Haste with the speed of men who know that eternal glory is the depending stake—haste to Jesus, *the Fountain of living waters.* Here *taste and see that the Lord is good.*

Ye young, ye giddy, and ye gay, listen to the voice of the great Redeemer, who tenderly invites you to the heavenly draught. The water which *He* gives will effectually quench that fearful thirst which must afflict you whilst you are unacquainted with his grace. It will abundantly repay every sacrifice he requires you to make; for *it will be in you a well of water springing up to everlasting life*, and he requires you to renounce nothing but what is really your misery and will prove your ruin. Not only the word of God asserts, the experience of ages also demonstrates, that *Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace.* Ask the Christian and he will inform you, that, let the devil and the world and the corrupt heart say what they will, there is beyond all controversy *peace and joy in believing.*

Let those who are in middle age reflect seriously on the indispensable necessity and inestimable value of this water of life. My friends, you must drink or you must perish, and the salvation of Christ Jesus will not only secure your

own souls, but will extend its divine influence to every circumstance and every relation. Are you blest with comforts? This is the embalmer of joy. Are you harassed with anxious solicitude? This is the sweetener of care. Are you visited with trials? This is the cordial of affliction. Is the favor of God the truest dignity and only bliss of man? This will wash you from all your pollution and render you fair in his sight. O shut not your eyes upon your own mercies! *Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

Are there here any old persons who have never embraced the glorious Savior? My brethren, your guilt is great, and as your glass is almost run, your day of grace cannot be long. Yet even you, who are at the eleventh hour, are entreated to come and drink of the water of life. You have much reason to be terribly alarmed, but none to despair. The rich warrant proclaims, *whosoever will, let him come.* Start from your stupid lethargy and flee at this critical moment to the Savior of souls. He can save even you, for his grace is sovereign, and it is almighty. If you cast yourselves upon it, all shall yet be well. You are come near to that dread valley, where burning sands swallow up the shallow rivulets of earthly comfort. But

the streams that flow from our Rock, Christ, will follow you through these sands—will accompany you into the dark and dreary vale of the shadow of death—will support and strengthen and cheer your spirits till you arrive in safety and triumph at the celestial Canaan.

Is any one saying in the bitterness of his soul, "Oh that I could obtain a draught of this divine, this living water! I see, I feel, that all the creatures, though well suited to answer the end for which they were given, are too gross in their nature, too limited in their extent, and too short in their duration, to satisfy my vast desires. I see that sin has ruined me, that I cannot help myself, and that without Christ I am lost forever. O that he would visit me with his mercy!" Are these your views, your fears, your wishes? Then to you, in a peculiar manner, is the word of this salvation sent. If Christ has made you sick of sin, it is the most pleasing symptom that he has begun to draw you to himself; and you may soon find, to your unspeakable joy, that he has drawn you much farther than you can now believe. It is the sweet pledge that he will send his word and heal you, that he will set you in a large place, and enable you to shout the praises of your redeeming God. Be not discouraged by your weakness, for *a bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will*

not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. Let not your guilt terrify you, for *though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* Think not the stain of your filthiness too deep to be washed out, for *the blood of Jesus cleanseth from* ALL *sin. Fear not, only believe.* Throw yourself upon his sovereignty, lay hold upon his promise, *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* Say not "I would, but cannot, hold fast of the promise." Your own ability is out of the question. You are not to consider what *you* can do, but what *Christ* can do. None embrace the gospel offer but they whom he enables to do it; and whenever a poor sinner stretches out his frail trembling hand towards the free promise, Christ incloses it in his own hand, and clasps it round the promise in so firm a grasp, that neither earth nor death nor hell can ever loose it. *Trust*, then, *in the Lord forever, for in this Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength; and they who believe on him shall never be confounded.*

Finally. Let all the disciples of Jesus, who have been drinking at the fountain of living waters, be careful not to undervalue their privilege, nor to throw contempt upon its adorable Author. Christians, have you, as the children of God, free access to the pure streams of un-

created bliss; and will you so injure your own souls, and dishonor your Redeemer, as to grovel in the polluted and poisonous waters of sinful pleasure? Shrink with horror from the idea! Have you, as the children of God, free access to all the fullness which is treasured up in Christ Jesus, and will you ever be at a loss where to apply for the relief of your wants? Let it be your study to improve this unspeakable gift of God. His nature, his attributes, his names, his covenant, his promises, his ordinances, are to his people so many *wells of salvation*, and their faith is never rightly employed, but in *drawing water from them.* The graces of the divine Spirit cannot divinely grow unless they be divinely cherished. The new creature is of heavenly birth, and must be nourished with heavenly food. As well might you expect that an infant should advance to youth, to manhood, to age, without continual supplies of provision, as that you should grow from babes, to men and fathers in Christ, without the perpetual aids of his Spirit and grace. Why do Christians become languid and faint? Why do they yield to temptation? Why are they vanquished by indwelling sin? It is because they so unfrequently visit the fountain of living waters. Let us learn, my brethren, to live not so much upon what we have received, as upon what

Christ has to give. *Be strong*, says the apostle, not in the grace which is in yourselves, but *in the grace which is in Christ Jesus.* Relying upon his all-sufficiency, we shall find that *they who wait on the Lord*, and they only, *shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

THE GOSPEL OFFER.

SERMON X.

THE GOSPEL OFFER.

JOHN VI. 37.

Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.

These words are part of a most interesting discourse which our Lord addressed to a number of his hearers, whom, shortly before, he had miraculously fed. Highly delighted with such an abundant, cheap, and seasonable supply, when they were worn out with fatigue, and fainting through hunger, and hoping, it seems, to be again feasted by the repetition of the miracle, they soon renewed their visit to the Savior. The Lord Jesus immediately saw, (for how could Omniscience not see?) the baseness of the principle by which they were actuated.

Ye seek me, said he, *not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled.* Not because your souls were lost in astonishment at the power, and your hearts melted with the love, of God, displayed in my ministration, but because your animal senses were gratified. My brethren, would to God there were not ground to fear that many who now profess the name of Christ, are governed by no better motives.

The Redeemer, however, who lost no opportunity of doing good, did not neglect to improve the present occasion. After discovering to these people his profound knowledge of their hearts, he leads their views from temporal to eternal things; from anxiety about their bodies, to concern for their souls. Under the metaphor of bread, he opens up his mediatorial character and office—illustrates the spiritual nature of his salvation—and strongly inculcates their absolute need of it. The farther he advances in his important instructions, the closer he brings his doctrine to their consciences. Having pointedly charged them with unbelief, that he might at once alarm their fears, and humble their pride, he solemnly tells them, *All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me;* and to encourage their hopes, he adds, *Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.* Can tongue express, can heart

conceive, the glory, the riches, of this precious promise? On this promise, many who are now singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, once hung their fainting spirits, and it carried them safely through guilt, through temptation, through death. Is its freedom restrained? or its grace diminished? or the power of the Promiser abridged? No. It is made by the same Savior—to the same kind of sinners—and conveys the same invaluable blessings. It holds up to the most daring offender, who will avail himself of the offer, a free, a full, an irrevocable pardon. It infolds in its spacious bosom all the benefits of the everlasting covenant—all that man can receive, or God bestow. Can any human heart remain insensible to such wondrous condescension? Can you hear with indifference, that Jesus, the Prince of life, the Lord of glory, stoops so low as to present such sweet invitations to the chief of sinners? O that *He who has the key of David, who openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth*, would send forth his light upon those truths which will demand your attention, while we inquire what is meant by coming to Christ, and endeavor to unfold the annexed promise.

I. We are to inquire what is meant by coming to Christ.

To come to Christ is in general to believe in him, and to believe in him is to "receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel."

This coming to Christ supposes several things.

1. That we are by nature strangers from God, and feel the misery of our destiny. While our first parents continued in their integrity, they were honored with free access to their Creator; but the breach of their fidelity ruined this divine privilege, and produced in their minds an alienation from their God. His righteous judgment made their choice their punishment, prohibiting them from that intercourse with himself which they labored to shun; and the flaming sword of the cherubim, and what is more terrible *the decree of justice*, barred up forever all approach to Jehovah by the old covenant. That this is our forlorn condition, and that there is no possibility of approach to God acceptably but by the new and living way which the Redeemer has opened, the very nature of his mission and his earnest invitation declare. Approaching to God by Jesus Christ supposes that we feel our distance from him, and farther, that we feel the misery of our estrangement. I need not tell you that when Adam fell he lost not only his dignity but his happiness. His mind, which was filled with light, serenity, innocence, bliss, and joy, became

the abode of darkness, inquietude, guilt, wretchedness, and sorrow. He has transmitted to us the doleful inheritance. Offenders in our offending parent, *we are by nature children of wrath.* By losing the favor of God we lost our all; we were degraded from his children and friends into the children and drudges of the devil. The temple of the Lord of hosts is converted into a den of thieves. A crowd of fiends, attended by every vile and hateful affection, has entered the soul of man. Enmity against God headed the gang, and the standard of rebellion is erected in that very spot which was once the palace of the King of kings. Can such a state be happy? Can it possibly not be miserable? God is the pure and only source of blessedness, and wo and death are as invariably the effects of distance from him, as darkness and cold, of distance from the sun. But a considerable part of man's misery is, that his apostasy has blinded his eyes and deadened his sensibility. He sees not that sin has robbed him of his beauty in defacing the image of his God. He sees not that sin has obliterated his fair title to eternal life. He feels not that sin, like a venomous reptile, is gnawing his vitals and infusing a mortal poison. These things, however, he must know, or he will not, he cannot, come to Jesus Christ. It is his office to save sinners, and to save *from* sin. But

surely they who discern neither danger in the state nor deformity in the character of a sinner, and who roll sin itself "as a sweet morsel under their tongues," will not, while under the influence of such views, think the gospel salvation any favor. Nobody, who is not conscious of a disease, will thank you for a remedy. It is, therefore, the first work of the Holy Spirit to *convince of sin.* In this work he rouses the conscience from its torpitude—he quickens the soul into life—he opens the eyes that were shut in spiritual death —he unmasks the sinner to himself—but ah! how great the alteration! Like a palsied limb which on the recovery of health feels the acutest pangs shoot through every nerve, the sinner now finds himself inconceivably wretched. He finds himself under the curse of a broken covenant, and therefore exposed to the vengeance of an angry God, exposed to the horrors of everlasting ruin. As the human mind is engaged in a perpetual search after happiness, the first question on such a discovery will be, how shall I escape the destruction which threatens me? It is more than probable that, unacquainted as yet with the wiles of Satan and the deceitfulness of his own heart, a person in this condition will betake himself to the law, which in its original form said, *Do and live*, and try to help himself by his *good works.* He will form resolutions of

amendment, and fondly hope to atone for the folly and guilt of his past by the wisdom and sanctity of his future conduct. But if the Lord intend to be gracious to him, he will not be allowed to trust in that *refuge of lies*. The Holy Spirit will show him that if he stop there, he is undone forever; and therefore coming to Jesus Christ supposes,

2. A sense of our utter inability to assist ourselves.

Under the divine instruction men learn wonderful lessons. The sinner had been convinced that he was guilty, he is now carried a step farther, and sees that he is filthy. His eyes are turned inwards upon his heart, and he is made acquainted with facts of which he had not the least suspicion. When he was told by the divine word, he would not believe what is proved to be too true, *that he is all as an unclean thing*—that his *very righteousnesses*, as he had simply imagined them, *are as filthy rags*—that his heart is a nest of abominations, *a cage of unclean and hateful birds*. His loathsomenesss in his own sight and in the sight of a holy God, who is *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, added to his danger, renders him doubly miserable. He gets a glimpse of the infinite evil of sin. He is sensible that nothing short of a spotless obedience to the divine law will be accepted by the Law-

giver. He is sensible, too, that a satisfaction must be made for the innumerable instances in which he has violated its precepts. What can he do? Were he to obey perfectly hereafter, all his obedience is a *debt*. There is no surplus to satisfy for past offenses. But instead of giving perfect obedience, he is incapable of performing *one* acceptable action. Sin is so mingled with all he does that his best deeds, the incense of his purest offerings, are *a smoke in Jehovah's nostrils*. And to put the finishing stroke to his self-confidence, he is obliged to subscribe the humiliating doctrine which tells him, that the broken law spreads its broad curse over his very righteousness. In the anguish which these views must excite, no wonder that he despairs of helping himself—no wonder that he is troubled and terrified with the apprehension of a God absolute and unreconciled. He can enter into the spirit of that passionate exclamation, *What shall I do to be saved?* The business, however, is not finished. The Lord is tearing him from the old root, but has not yet ingrafted him into Christ the living Vine. He has hitherto looked only at the high demands of God's law, and his own unworthiness, weakness, and vileness; but he has not looked at the blessed Mediator. Coming to Jesus Christ supposes, then,

3. A view of him as that very Savior whom we need. When the soul is sinking under the weight of guilt, and every moment fears that the black cloud of divine wrath will burst over his devoted head, how reviving, how transporting the thought, that the *blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin!* This precious truth, my brethren, is the only thing which can revive the dying hope of a convinced sinner. A Savior! delightful sound! A Savior who has made an atonement for sinners! May I depend upon this heavenly information? Yes, for *his blood cleanseth from* ALL *sin.* What! from *all* sin? Will it cleanse from *my* sin? It will. In the mingled emotions of wonder and joy, a sinner cannot but long to be better acquainted with this celestial Friend. He opens the volume of inspiration, and there he obtains all the intelligence he can wish. He is told that in the glorious Redeemer there is a fullness to relieve every want. Does he find himself debarred by the flaming sword of justice from approaching to God by the old covenant? He is told that Jesus Christ is the new and living Way to the Father. Does he need a justifying righteousness? He is told that Jesus Christ has *brought in an everlasting righteousness.* Nay, that he is himself *the Lord our Righteousness.* Does he need strength? He is told that Jesus Christ is the Lord our

Strength also. Does he need to be purified from his pollution? He is told that by pleading the merits of Jesus Christ he may expect the accomplishment of that gracious promise, *I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you.* Oh! my brethren, how does a sight of glorious Christ tarnish all other glory! It sickens a man to the covenant of works—it makes him say of the covenant of grace, of which Jesus Christ is the Surety and the Head, *It is well-ordered in all things and sure; it is all my salvation and all my desire.* But as a bare sense of the suitableness of the Mediator is different from surrendering ourselves up to him, coming to Jesus Christ is,

In the last place, the rolling of our guilty souls, with all their vileness and all their unworthiness, upon his rich sovereign grace.

When a man, into whose mind God hath shined so as to give him an insight into the great things of which we have been discoursing, looks at himself and sees nothing but death there—when he looks at the law and sees nothing but death there—when he looks at the creature and sees nothing but emptiness and barrenness and death there—when he looks at Jesus Christ and sees in him light, and life, and grace, and all the fullness of Deity—he cannot but say, in the pros-

pect of going away from Christ, *Lord, to whom shall I go? thou hast the words of eternal life.* He reasons as the lepers of old, "If I sit here, I die; if I go back, I shall die; if I push forward and make an experiment of his grace, I can but die." These exercises are the suggestions of the blessed Spirit. They terminate upon a *whole* Christ, upon Christ in all his offices. With these exercises, and with *the everlasting arms underneath him*, the sinner casts himself down at the feet of Jesus. Happy, thrice happy they, whose souls are exalted into such humility—who willingly lay their honors in the dust, and set the crown upon the Redeemer's head. Nor is this the characteristic of a few; it is the common temper of all God's children—a temper which you must have if ever you see his face in peace.

To prevent poor sinners from thus coming to the Savior, Satan leaves nothing unattempted. When he cannot lull them any longer in a state of security, he commonly endeavors to persuade them that they have sinned away their day of grace, and that Christ will not receive them. But *he was a liar from the beginning.* Fear not, trembling soul; impudent as he is, you may stop his mouth. He cannot, blessed be God, he cannot erase from your Bibles the gracious declaration of the text, *Him that cometh to me I*

will in no wise cast out. The unfolding of this promise is the

II. Topic to which your attention was invited.

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out, i. e. I will undoubtedly receive him. I will not cast him from me *now*—whatever has been his past character—whatever the aggravations of his guilt—whatever are his present fears—whatever the temptations of Satan. I invite him to the arms of my love; I promise him a welcome reception.

This however is not all. Jesus will not only admit you into his favor *now*, but he will not cast you out of it *hereafter*. Those whom *he once loves he loves to the end.* He gives to all his people *eternal life, and they shall* NEVER *perish*—no future backslidings, no provocations, will induce him to forsake them utterly. If they *break his statutes, and keep not his commandments, then will he indeed visit their transgressions with the rod and their iniquity with stripes.* If like refractory children they attempt to run from home, he will scourge them back to their Father's house; but he administers his corrections with a parent's hand—he intends to teach them how bitter sin is—to make them live more by faith, and nearer himself. His chastisements are no proof that they have lost the privilege of their adoption, for *nevertheless*, says he, *my loving*

kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. And why not? Because of their good behavior? That would be a dreary doctrine. Far otherwise. *My covenant*, he adds, *will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.* (Ps. lxxxix. 31, 34.) And a clause of this covenant is, *I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me.* (Jer. xxxii. 40.) *Therefore there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.* As a consequence it follows, that those who come to Christ he will not cast out of his kingdom of glory. The connection between faith in the Lord Jesus and eternal life is as infallible as God can make it; we can no more disjoin them than we can separate truth from the divine nature. And this is a principle so clearly revealed in your Bibles, that it would be needless to attempt its proof.

Pause then a moment, and ask yourselves what an immortal being can wish that the Redeemer does not promise in the text? Say, is it not your wisdom, is it not your honor, is it not your happiness, to surrender your hearts and devote your lives to this heavenly Suitor? What greater wisdom than to secure that good part which shall not be taken from you? So that, happen what will, all shall be well with you? What honor should be so ardently courted as

that of becoming the sons of God?—of shining in the robes of imputed righteousness?—of wearing through eternity a crown of glory? What happiness like that which lies in Jehovah's favor? for it is life, and his loving kindness is better than life.

"Precious blessings! but we dare contemplate them only at a distance. We have so often turned our backs upon them and their adorable Author, that we fear there is no hope for us," may perhaps be the language of some present. Why, my friends, why indulge such a fear? You have all the encouragement imaginable to believe that he will freely pardon even *your* transgressions, and adopt you into his family.

For, in the first place: The salvation of sinners is the object and the business of his mediation. *The Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost.* For this very purpose he was set up from everlasting and commissioned into our world; nay, it is so peculiarly his office that he received his *name* from it. *Thou shalt call his name Jesus, because he shall save his people from their sins.* Who are his people? Certainly they to whom *he gives power to become the sons of God.* And who are these? *As many as believe on his name.* Stretch forth, then, the withered arm; endeavor to lay hold on his covenant; let your hope lift up her languishing

head; for the Redeemer is never employed in work more suitable to his character than when he confers on such as *you* the blessings of his grace. You have, therefore, nothing less to animate your souls than the express design of the scheme of salvation, and all the perfections of God, which are pledged for the security of those who embrace it.

2. As it is the business, so it is the delight, of the Lord Christ to save even the *chief* of sinners. It was in the prospect of this blessed work that, when the council of peace was held in eternity, *he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men.* The conversion of a sinner produces great joy in heaven, and the first smile brightens on the countenance of the Son of God. This heavenly personage, this incarnate God, is never so much grieved, nor considers himself treated with so much indignity, as when sinners refuse the offers of his love. If they will not listen to his expostulations, he leaves them with regret. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together.* (Hos. xi. 8.)

The Lord Jesus is well pleased to be employed by sinners in transacting their eternal interests.

Be persuaded to put your souls, and all their concerns, into his hand. You cannot commit them to a better, nor a more faithful agent. You cannot find a more powerful friend, nor a more effectual pleader. He is minister plenipotentiary in the court of heaven; and they whose cause he undertakes, shall undoubtedly succeed. Rob not the Savior of his glory, but let your redemption add a new trophy to the triumphs of his grace.

3. He has actually saved sinners as unlikely as yourselves to obtain his favor. The scriptures tell us of a Manasseh, whose murders made the streets of Jerusalem run down with innocent blood, and who, nevertheless, became a wondrous monument of redeeming grace. They tell us of a Mary Magdalen, in whom dwelt seven devils, and yet they could not prevent a gracious visit from Christ. They tell us of a Paul, who was a persecutor, blasphemous, and injurious, *but he obtained mercy.* They tell us of those who were guilty of crucifying the Lord of glory, and yet this blackest of guilt was washed away in the blood of sprinkling. Were you to enumerate the vile abominations which have disgraced and rendered miserable our nature, and to present the list to the redeemed in Heaven, how many would say, "And such were *we!*" Oh, sinner! the path you wish

to tread, has been trodden by millions before you, and *like* you. You injure the freeness and fullness of the Redeemer's grace, by hesitating a moment about his willingness to save you.

4. Christ has told you—in the text he tells you, that he is as willing, as he is able, to save to the uttermost, all that come to God by him. And where has he contradicted himself? *Him that cometh to me*, is the unlimited proclamation, *I will in no wise cast out.* Nay, he has gone farther; he has not only said, he has *sworn*, and sworn by himself, (the most solemn oath that God can take,) that he will not reject you. But by your questioning his willingness, you give him the lie; you believe the devil and your own deceitful hearts, and believe them at the expense of Jehovah's truth. Away with this false humility. It dishonors God, and is fraught with poison to your own souls. It is the most inveterate enemy the Redeemer has—seize this traitor, and nail him to his cross. The great Mediator has promised to receive you. That is enough—take him at his word. He has put no qualification in his warrant—see that you put none there. Fix your eye upon his atonement—bring his promise to his throne—plead it there, "Lord, do as thou hast said." Such a cry has never been, shall never be unanswered; it pierces the third heavens, and brings Jesus to the relief of the

soul. And in all your supplications, remember that the salvation of Christ is absolutely *free;* a quality which it could not have if it excluded any who are willing to submit to it. There is not one way to life for little, and another for great sinners. Are your iniquities heinously aggravated? Then you have more need of the Savior! Then the honors of his love will be more magnified in your salvation! Then you will be more deeply indebted to his grace! The redeemed will all shout, but you will shout upon a higher note, *to him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood—be glory and dominion forever and ever.* (Rev. i. 5, 6.)

As the whole of this discourse has been practical, the improvement shall consist in a very few obvious reflections.

1. If coming to Jesus Christ implies the several things which have been mentioned, it highly concerns all who have hitherto lived contented with a mere profession, to realize their misery and their danger. My brethren, you seem to forget that *a form of godliness* will not save your souls. All who have any respect for the system of divine truth, profess to believe, though the conduct of too many belies their creed, that there is no salvation detached from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now what will it profit you, that this precious principle is inscribed in every page

of your Bible, and has a place in your understandings and memories, if it do not, by the blessing of God, deeply affect, and thoroughly renew your hearts? Let me ask you, and let conscience, as in the presence of Jehovah, put home the question, Have you felt yourselves wretched, aliens from God, children of wrath, under the curse, and obnoxious to the vengeance of his holy law? Have you found yourselves polluted, your power to do good entirely lost, and inherent depravity contaminating and poisoning, like the pestilence, what you once imagined your best works? Have you utterly despaired of doing any thing to relieve yourselves from your woful condition? Have your minds been illuminated to see the glory of the Redeemer's person, the suitableness and the necessity of his offices; the freedom and the fullness of his grace? Are you pleased with the plan of salvation; that wondrous plan which puts the crown upon the Mediator's head, and lays your honors and your importance prostrate in the dust? Have you surrendered your hearts. and consecrated your lives, to this almighty Savior? If you are his people indeed, if you are the just expectants of a happy immortality, you certainly know something of these things. If you do not, it is to be hoped you will not dare, in virtue of a mere profession, to seat yourselves,

to-morrow, at the table of the Lord. Allow me, my friends, to deal plainly with you; and do you deal plainly and honestly with yourselves. The table shall be spread, but only for the children of the kingdom—the Master comes, but he calls not for you—you have not the wedding-garment; you have no invitation from Zion's King to this feast of love; and at your peril be it, if you go uninvited. Nay, if you know nothing of those exercises of the soul on which our reflections have dwelt this evening, you are not only unbidden to our gospel repast, but the whole of your religion is a dead form, an empty shell, a religion for this world, and it will attend you no farther than this world. It will leave you at death, when you will most sadly need comfort and support. *Be not deceived: God is not mocked. If any man be in Christ, he is a* NEW *creature. You* MUST *be born again*—you must have a justifying righteousness, and sanctifying grace; without this, *no man shall see the Lord.* Without this, no splendid profession, no extensive knowledge, no exalted privileges, will benefit you in the most trying hour. All these you may have, and yet go down to the grave with a *lie in your right hand.* O that you were wise to know, *in this your day, the things that belong to your peace.*"

2. Will Jesus Christ reject none who come to him? then all who perish, perish by their own fault. Christ and all the benefits of the everlasting covenant are now offered to the chief of sinners. To every one in this assembly, whatever his character, whatever his crimes, the free promise of eternal life is presented. Nay, wherever the joyful sound is heard, the gracious proclamation announces peace and pardon through the blood of Jesus. By this blood a fountain is opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. *Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters! Whosoever* WILL, *let him come and take the waters of life freely!* Whatever therefore you may pretend; however plausible the excuses by which you satisfy your consciences while you despise the blessed Savior; the truth is, (for He who cannot lie hath said so,) *You* WILL NOT *come to him that you may have life.* You are then your own destroyers; and at the awful appearance of your Judge, guilt will stop your mouths; or should you attempt to speak, your mouths will condemn you. The Lord now waits to be gracious; but remember, that if you persist and die in your unbelief, *there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.*

3. Since Jesus Christ will cast out none who come to him, let it be your care, Christians, to live by faith upon him. May the most inveterate rebel against God look for forgiveness and acceptance through the Mediator's atonement? and shall not his children, who are already justified by that atonement, have boldness and confidence in their approaches to his throne? You have many corruptions to subdue—many trials to sustain—many foes to resist—and therefore, if you expect to succeed, you must have many errands to the throne of grace. And be not now strangers at that throne—spread before it all your weaknesses and all your wants. Pour out, into the bosom of your Father, all your anxieties and all your griefs. Do you feel your lusts strong, and your graces weak? Do not spend your time in lamenting your feebleness, but betake yourselves to him who is not only the Lord your righteousness but the Lord your *strength*. Does your great adversary seem to be let loose upon you? Does he, as a ravenous lion, terrify you by his roarings? Does he, as a skillful and malicious enemy, discharge into your souls his fiery darts? Run instantly to the Captain of your salvation—he has an arm that is full of power. In our text he has pledged himself to secure you; and as he cannot deny himself, his

faithfulness will be your shield and your buckler.

Have you acted treacherously towards your Lord? Have you grieved him by backsliding from him? And has he in righteous indignation withdrawn from you the light of his countenance? Humble yourselves under his mighty hand, but do not mistake the meaning of his providence. He chastens because he loves you. He says, with inexpressible tenderness, *Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.* Answer his call, *Behold! we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God.* (Jer. iii. 22.) Whilst the tear of ingenuous shame starts in your eye, fix it on his everlasting righteousness—let your trembling hand again lay hold of his covenant—bow at his footstool—plead his promise—you shall not be disappointed, for it is a truth more stable than the heavens, that *them who come to him he will in no wise cast out.*

THE GOSPEL NO CAUSE OF SHAME.

SERMON XI.

THE GOSPEL NO CAUSE OF SHAME.

ROMANS I. 16.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

Zeal for the glory of his Divine Master was the most prominent feature in the character of the apostle Paul. Hurried away by the blind impulses of ignorant superstition and inveterate malice, he had formerly persecuted with unrelenting fury all who named the name of Jesus. The account which he gives of himself exhibits the most hideous picture of frantic impiety. *I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Naza-*

reth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. (Acts xxvi. 9, 11.)

Under these circumstances, who would have thought, according to human judgment, that the conversion of Paul was a probable, not to say a possible, event? Assuredly, had he been governed by worldly motives, we never should have heard of him as a Christian, far less would his name have shone with such splendor on the list of apostles. But what obstacles can arrest the power of Christ, or prevent him from bringing to himself in the moment of love the *chosen vessels* of mercy. No sooner does divine grace take possession of the soul than the heart of stone melts—the fury of persecution subsides—the murdering sword is cast away—the first breath of penitence cries, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*—Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the apostle. With an ardor proportioned to his former enmity, "he now preaches the faith which once he destroyed"—he plants the standard of the Messiah in that very city which wit-

nessed his rebellion and was the scene of his cruelty—he glories in the cross of Christ—he sees clearly all the dangers which attend such a profession, and all the calumny and odium which are heaped upon those who make it. But unappalled by danger, unmoved by calumny, he throws to his adversaries the gauntlet of defiance. "Why," says he, "should I blush for my Redeemer? Let them blush who never saw his glory nor felt his love. But *I*, who know both, *am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ;* and I have the best reason not to be ashamed of it, *for*, let men reproach it as they please, *it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*"

In this noble testimony which Paul gives to the gospel, he speaks with the warmth and eagerness of a man who felt its importance and certainty. Enlarged views of the gracious scheme it unfolds impressed him with the deep conviction that it alone can bear the weight of an immortal soul. Enraptured with the heavenly prospects it opens, not only in this world but beyond the grave, his heart glowed with fervent gratitude to their adorable Author; and unable to repress his devout affection, he cries out, *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.* This was not more the heroism of an inspired apostle than it is the temper of all believers.

They have in their own bosoms the same divine principle which animated the faith and hope and magnanimity of Paul. 'Tis true, in them it may not be equally active, nor its operations of equal extent; but the principle they have and must have. Born of the same Father—united to the same Redeemer—guided by the same Spirit, they must have the same disposition. However weak their faith, however faint their hope, however dead their frame, it is their "unaltered wish" to glorify their Savior. And could you see their inmost souls, you might read there, in very legible characters, *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.* Too often, indeed, their actions are wholly inconsistent with their character and sentiments. They shrink from the frown or sneer of *a world that lieth in wickedness.* But of this timidity they ought to be ashamed. It is the fruit of their unbelief—the badge of their folly—the chastisement of their sin.

That they may not be left to act so unworthy and ungrateful a part should be the constant study and prayer of Christians; and they will find the subject of our present attention fraught with sweet and powerful motives to *hold fast*, not merely their faith, but *the* PROFESSION *of their faith, without wavering;* for it naturally leads us to take a view of the gospel of Christ—to notice some of the reasons for which carnal men

are ashamed of it—to display the Christian temper by showing what is comprehended in *not* being ashamed of it—and to illustrate the argument by which the bold profession of it is defended.

In prosecuting the plan which has now been proposed, and depending upon that gracious aid without which we can do nothing, let us,

In the first place, take a brief view of the gospel of Christ.

Gospel, as is commonly remarked, signifies *glad tidings;* and the term is appropriated, with peculiar propriety, to the revelation of divine mercy as it is manifested in Christ Jesus.

The gospel well deserves to be termed *glad tidings* in a variety of respects, as it answers to complete satisfaction the most important questions that man can ask. It resolves our doubts about the nature and character of God—about the dispensations of his providence—about a future state—about the misery of our present condition, and about the method of our recovery.

1. The gospel of Christ informs us about the nature and character of God.

That man, who was created in the divine image and honored with the divine favor and communication, should so fatally degenerate as to forget the first lesson which was taught to his species, a knowledge of the God who made

him, is not a more melancholy proof of his depravity than it is a part of his misery. Credulity itself could scarcely have believed that human reason, which originally was pure and clear, should be so debased and blinded as to mistake entirely the nature and plainest attributes of God, and to ascribe any of them to the creatures of his hand. But the fact is unquestionable. The dreadful apostasy of our race plunged us into such woful ignorance, that we groped in darkness even at noon-day. I should abuse your understandings should I attempt to prove that the heathen world was overspread with the grossest superstition and idolatry. I should waste your time in recapitulating the opposite opinions which were entertained of God, not only by the multitude, but also by the greatest philosophers. Whether there is one great and glorious Being who centers in himself all the perfections of Deity, or whether these are distributed amongst more than one, is a question about which the philosophers hesitated, and which the vulgar decided in favor of Polytheism. Such a decision must necessarily draw after it a train of fatal errors respecting every part of the divine character, and every relation it bears to us. Its practical effects are briefly, but elegantly and strikingly, summed up by our apostle when he tells us, in the close of this

first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that men *changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever.* Even they, who, a little more enlightened, condemned idolatry, and were inclined to favor the doctrine of the unity of God, were much at a loss concerning other matters of the highest moment. Is God a Spirit? Is he the author of evil? If not, is he so necessarily holy that he must punish sin? Is there any possible way of escaping his righteous indignation? Will he certainly bring us into judgment for all our actions, or only for some? Does he take notice of our thoughts? How is he to be worshiped? Ought we to worship him at the hazard of mistaking the acceptable mode, and thus bring upon ourselves new and accumulated guilt? Or ought we to omit it altogether? On these and other important questions the wisest of the heathens said the least; and they who were most positive most frequently erred. So truly does the apostle say, that *professing themselves to be wise they became fools*, and that *the world by wisdom knew not God.* From this frightful state of doubt, suspense, and perplexity, the gospel of Christ delivered the world. It chased away the

clouds which wrapped in darkness the human mind, and poured upon the gloom of midnight a flood of day. This gospel declares that God is One. *Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God is* ONE JEHOVAH. It also declares *how* he is one, in revealing to us the mystery of the adorable Trinity—the wonderful mystery of three equal divine persons subsisting in one undivided essence—a mystery of dread importance, of which the knowledge is absolutely necessary to our eternal happiness, but which mere reason could never have conjectured, far less discovered. The gospel declares that "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." In his *being*, and therefore as he could have no beginning, so he can have no alteration nor end, but must continue the same, in all the glory of his nature, *to-day, yesterday, and forever.* In his *wisdom*, and therefore all things, even the most secret thoughts, are open to his sight, and shall all be conducted to the best and noblest end. In his *power*, and therefore the determinations of his wisdom can never be frustrated, but shall certainly be carried into complete execution. In his *holiness*, and therefore he cannot be the author of evil; he must hate sin with a perfect hatred; he cannot allow it to pass with impunity, but must punish it as infallibly as he

is God. In his *justice*, and therefore while he supports the dignity of his laws and the rights of his government, and vindicates the honors of his character, his decisions must be according to truth, and so perfectly equitable as to shut the mouth of every offender. In his *goodness*, and therefore we may be assured that *he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men;* that the innocent cannot suffer; that they who do suffer must be sinners and the authors of their own misery; and that there is here laid a foundation on which even the guilty may hope to be delivered from the condemnation to which their consciences tell them they are liable, provided the deliverance can be effected in a consistency with all the divine attributes. And in his *truth*, so that neither his promises nor his threatenings can possibly fail.

Farther, the gospel of Christ declares that God is to be worshiped—that he is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth—secretly and openly —that to neglect this duty is death—and that it cannot be acceptably performed, but in the mode prescribed in the revelation of the covenant of grace.

As the account which divine revelation gives of the nature and character of God, far exceeds, both in value and extent, all the accounts to which uninspired philosophy can pretend; so

the marks of decided superiority are stamped with equal clearness, upon the account which it gives of the government of God. I therefore observe,

2. That the gospel of Christ affords us true and interesting views of Divine Providence.

How great was the confusion and perplexity of the acutest observers of the moral world, when, unaided by revelation, they attempted to develop the mysteries of Providence: and how vain were all their efforts to extricate themselves from their difficulties, can be a secret to none who are acquainted with the state of mankind before the promulgation of the gospel. That God, the Creator of the universe, governs it with unerring wisdom, almighty power, and unceasing care, is a proposition so plain to those who know their Bibles, and with which conscience so immediately closes, that we are apt to imagine no man can refuse, for a moment, his cordial and unhesitating assent. Yet even this proposition, all clear and commanding as it is, was much controverted by pagans of old, and, as if God meant to stain the pride of human reason, it is controverted at this hour by many who reject the scriptures of truth. Amongst the heathen, Divine Providence was a subject which seldom occupied the thoughts of the vulgar, and about which the wise were perpetually quarreling.

Some denied, in the gross, God's creating power and goodness. Some, though they ascribed to him the power of creating, were for excluding him entirely from governing, the world; fondly and impiously dreaming that all things are driven at random by blind fatality, or blinder chance, and that God concerns himself neither in human affairs, nor in any thing else. Others, measuring Infinite Wisdom and power by their own ignorance and feebleness, and unable to comprehend how a single mind can attend to the varied, and multiplied, and intricate affairs of a universe, wished to rid the Deity of fatigue, and contrived to parcel out the world amongst a number of divinities, to each of whom they assigned a peculiar province. And the few, who, more sound in their judgments, and more sober in their inquiries, admitted God's superintendence over the works of his hands, and labored to shun the dangers of a contrary opinion, were yet puzzled and confounded by the occurrences of every day. When they adverted to the different classes and characters of men, they felt that to reconcile their situations, in the common course of events, with a good, a wise, an equitable providence, was a task too hard for their deepest thought, and most diligent research. If any thing is to be gathered from a general notion of of God's character, and the first dictates of rea-

son and conscience, it is this general maxim, that evil ought to be punished, and good rewarded. But when men, guided by the mere light of nature, turned their attention to the actual administration of Providence, how awful and disheartening was it to find, that this leading character of an upright governor, was apparently contradicted by almost every act of his government. When they saw iniquity at ease, and prosperity taking up her abode in the dwellings of the wicked—when they saw plenty open her treasures, and pour upon their heads her choice, her balmy blessings—and honor crowning their lives with her most flattering distinctions; especially when they saw, on the other hand, that men, to their discernment unblemished in their characters, and venerable for their virtues, were frequently reduced to struggle with the complicated ills of life—to languish under disease, or pine in poverty—to become the victims of oppression and falsehood, or to sink beneath a load of injuries—when they observed these things, what could they say? Renounce the doctrine of a providence, they could not, without renouncing their reason; and they could hardly retain it, without renouncing their senses. Who will help them in this sad dilemma? Who will answer a question like the following? "Do not such dispensations look like a

bounty on crimes, and a penalty on innocence?" The difficulty is great and serious: it is so great, that reflection upon it staggered the faith, and almost overturned the steadfastness, of one who was favored with divine revelation. *Verily*, said Asaph, in the agony of his soul, *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.* (Ps. lxxiii. 13.) Nor were his doubts removed, nor the rebellion of his heart subdued, *till he went into the sanctuary of God.* As for those who had not revelation, the only thing which could in the least alleviate their painful anxiety, is the idea of future retribution. But this idea, as we shall hereafter see, was at most the trembling conjecture of a probable fact, and by no means the firm and solid conviction of an undoubted reality. But had the conviction been ever so firm, difficulties which we cannot now mention, still remained. If philosophy was required to solve them, she shrunk from the unequal attempt; or if she undertook it, it was only to betray her feebleness, and to mock the expectation of her followers. But here, when every human resource failed, the gospel of Christ stepped in, and with all the dignity and ease of heavenly truth, untied these gordian knots which bad defiance to the ingenuity of man. I do not mean to say that the gospel discloses all the secrets of the divine government.

There are many things which we may not, should not know. Things, of which the knowledge is graciously concealed from us, as it could serve no purpose but to render us miserable. There are many things which we could not know. Things so deep and mysterious as to be far beyond the reach of any created intellect. And therefore, intruding curiosity may start a thousand difficulties which no mortal can remove. But this is no prejudice to the gospel. Its discoveries are adapted, with infinite wisdom, to our circumstances. It unfolds so much of the plan of Divine Providence as is necessary and useful—so much as may justify, even to our frail understandings, *the ways of God to men*—as may teach the wicked the most alarming lessons—as may strengthen and animate the faith, and hope, and peace of the believer.

The gospel informs us, that as God *created all things for himself*, so he *upholds them by the word of his power*, and rules them by the counsel of his will. It informs us that he framed, in eternity, the plan of all his operations; and that *Providence* is nothing but the gradual development of this plan, at such seasons, and in such degrees, as to his wisdom appears fit—that the plan is unalterable in itself: *I am Jehovah, I change not; My counsel shall stand*, says he, *and I will do all my pleasure*—that it is so infallible

in its execution, as not to be hindered for a moment by any impediment whatsoever; for *he doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou?*—that it is so boundless in its extent, as to comprehend all things, even objects the most minute, and incidents apparently the most trifling. *The hairs of your head*, they are the words of our Redeemer, *the very hairs of your head are all numbered;* and *a sparrow shall not fall to the ground without your Father.* That nothing can happen but in a subserviency to the end which God has in view—that all second causes, though operating in different ways, and even though hostile in themselves to this end, are combined effectually to promote it. *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath thou wilt restrain.* The gospel bids us not to wonder if we cannot account for many proceedings of the Governor of the universe, since his *way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known.* It bids us not to be stumbled if we see the *wicked spreading like a green bay-tree*, high in power, and wantoning in plenty; because this is not the way in which God expresses his approbation and favor, as his word declares, and innumerable facts prove: for nothing is more

certain than that inward happiness is far from being a necessary attendant upon outward prosperity, and because wise and valuable purposes are accomplished by this dispensation. Were God to cut off immediately the notoriously wicked, he could not bring all his sons to glory, many of whom are to spring from them, and are to receive, and love, and honor that Redeemer, whom their fathers rejected, and hated, and vilified. In the mean time, he makes them, though they know it not, the instruments of building up his church, and by loading them with benefits, he renders their impiety the more inexcusable, their guilt the more flagrant, and his justice in punishing them the more conspicuous. If, in righteous indignation, he sometimes scatter their wealth, and stain their honors, and blast their prospects, and bring upon them the swift and fearful recompense of their crimes, he teaches men that *verily there is a God who judgeth rightly.* Thus, both his long-suffering and his vengeance throw a lustre on his wisdom. Were all punished, men would forget an hereafter. Did all escape, they would think that God had forsaken the earth, and that whatever they did, the Lord regarded not.

On the other hand, as the gospel tells us that external felicity is not always a mark of the divine favor, so it bids us not to be surprised if

we see good men laboring under the pressure of calamity. It silences the voice of murmuring by giving us to understand that, considering the infinite evil of sin, however God may frown upon even the righteous, he treats them far more gently and tenderly than they deserve. *Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* (Lam. iii. 39.) As if the prophet had said, "What! out of hell, and yet complain? Blush, O man, for thy ingratitude! Tremble for thy presumption!" But the gospel farther informs us that we greatly mistake in concluding a man miserable, because he is poor, or despised, or oppressed—that the peace and pleasure of a Christian are a peace and pleasure which, as the world cannot give, so it cannot take away—that even in calamity the "consolations of God" impart more gladness and better enjoyment than can be felt or known by the wicked *when their corn and their wine abound.* It informs us *that all things*, even the most unpromising, *shall work together for good to them who love God, and are the called according to his purpose*—that afflictions are the discipline of their Father's house—and that the exercise of this discipline towards them is at once a proof and privilege of their adoption, for *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*—that he makes

affliction an instrument by which he "purges away the dross, takes away the tin, and purifies the gold, of his people—by which he mortifies their corruptions and quickens their graces—by which he weans them from a criminal attachment to this world, and teaches them that as they profess to be citizens of heaven, they should justify their title to the exalted character by *setting their affections on things above*—and finally, the gospel informs us, that their sufferings shall not only be blessed to them here, but shall be abundantly repaid hereafter, when Jehovah shall finish the present dispensation of things by giving to the wicked the exact and impartial due of their iniquities, and bringing the righteous to *Zion with songs*, when *everlasting joy shall be upon their heads*, when *sorrow and sighing shall flee away*, and God himself shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. I therefore remark,

3. That the gospel of Christ affords us the truest information about a *future state*.

The gospel informs us that we shall live hereafter—that as soon as the soul is separated from the body by death, it repairs to the tribunal of God, where it receives a sentence which fixes its eternal destiny—that this sentence, however, is but the first part of the divine proceeding—that God has appointed a day in which he will openly

judge the world by Jesus Christ—that at this awfully interesting period the trump of God shall burst the caverns of the dead, and startle into life the slumbering dust—that the bodies of men thus raised shall be reunited to their souls —that after this new union they shall be summoned, amidst the dread solemnities of a descending God and the convulsions of a dissolving universe, before the judgment-seat of Christ—that there they *must give an account of all the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil*—that infinite equity will pass upon every individual an irreversible decision—that then the scene will be forever closed, when the *wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*

When men consider themselves immortal beings, and believe that their present state has a most serious influence upon the happiness or misery of an eternal existence, it becomes a subject of important investigation to know what their state *is*, and how they may be sure of future bliss.

To obtain true satisfaction, let them not run to philosophic schools—let them not trudge through the pathless desert of wild conjecture —let them not be duped by the high pretensions of learned ignorance. Miserable comforters are

they all! The Bible alone can help them in their straits; and, therefore, we may observe,

4. That the gospel of Christ opens to our view the *nature of our present condition.*

Vain was every exertion to account for the introduction and prevalence of sin, and to discover the extent of its direful consequences. The gospel reveals to us the dreadful secret. It informs us that man was at first created pure, spotless, and transcendently happy—perfectly innocent—shining in the rays of his Creator's glory—surrounded with delights, and dignified with the homage of an obedient world, there was nothing which could give him one painful emotion. All within was serene and joyous—all without secure and peaceful. That in this situation his God entered into a covenant with him by giving him, as the test of his gratitude and his duty, a law which was admirably fitted to promote his happiness. That the condition of this covenant was perfect obedience to the divine law. That eternal life and glory were promised as the high reward of fidelity, and death, in the largest meaning of the word, death temporal, spiritual, and eternal, was threatened as the tremendous penalty in case of unfaithfulness. That this covenant was made with our first parents, not as individuals, but as a *nature*, as the public representatives of their future family, who

should therefore stand or fall with them, live in their life, and die in their death. That God marked, as the pledge of their obedience, a certain tree, from which he commanded them to abstain. That, regardless of his command, abusing the liberty with which he had endued them, and yielding to the suggestions of Satan, an apostate spirit, they plucked the forbidden fruit—they transgressed the covenant of their God—they fell from their integrity. That at the instant of their fall the broken law arrested them, and they became exposed to all the horrors which its curse contains. That by their disobedience they broke down the sacred hedge which divine faithfulness had placed around them. That sin, with all her hellish train, rushed through the breach into our world, and from that fatal moment to this has spread desolation and wo amongst men. But this is not all. The gospel informs us, that we are, every one of us, *by nature children of wrath*, deriving from our first parents both guilt and depravity; and that this is the corrupted source from which all actual transgressions proceed. That, in consequence of our guilt and pollution, we are odious and loathsome in the sight of a holy God, and have in our hearts a principle of enmity against him. That *dead in trespasses and sins*, we can do nothing to help ourselves, as we can do nothing but sin. That no created power can help

us, or loose us in the least from our connection with the violated covenant. That while this connection subsists we can expect nothing but what the covenant has to give, and that this is nothing but *the fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.*

This information, if viewed in itself, is dreadful—enough to strike the chill of death into every heart—and were the message of God to stop here, instead of bringing glad tidings, it would convert our world into a very hell. But it is one of the benevolent characteristics of the religion of Jesus, that it smites, only to heal; it lays open the disease, that it may apply the remedy. And hence we remark,

Lastly, That the gospel of Christ reveals a method of recovery from our ruined condition.

Had Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, been asked, "Can sinful men be saved, and the honor of his Creator be preserved?" his silence would have proclaimed his inability to answer. It is one of the first dictates of reason, that a criminal ought to atone for his crime. But what atonement, what satisfaction, can a sinner make? His offense is infinite—all that he has, all that he can do, is a debt. Will repentance help him? Alas! the law knows not of repentance. It fixes the penalty with the transgressor; and if God be faithful to himself, the penalty must be

executed. And now, when all prospect of escape is cut off, who shall screen the offender from wrath? Shall not despair blacken his countenance, and harrow up his soul? Oh no! at this season of need, the gospel of Christ leaps down from heaven, and brings speedy and effectual relief. It is the sum of her reviving message, *Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom.* In the explication of this transporting news, the gospel informs us that God, out of mere mercy, resolved to save a number of sinful men, and to save them in a way which should bring all the glory to his sovereign grace; that as he could not dispense with the sanction of his law, and as man was utterly unable to give the satisfaction which the law required, the Second Person of the glorious trinity voluntarily offered to assume our nature, to become the substitute of all whom the Father should give him, and who should believe upon his name, and in that character to obey perfectly the divine law, and endure the whole of the terrible punishment which their sins deserved; and thus pave the way for restoring them to divine favor, and making them certain heirs of eternal life. That in the fullness of time, fixed by infinite wisdom, the Lord Jesus actually came into our world—that being born in an extraordinary manner, he was not one of Adam's

represented children—was neither guilty, nor polluted—was not exposed to the curse, nor bound by the obligations of the law, and that he consented to be made under it as the representative of his people, both in its obligations and in its curse. That having graciously submitted to be made thus under the law, he *did* perfectly obey it, through a life of labor, temptation, and suffering. That at his death he *did* make himself an offering. That stretched upon the accursed tree, and deprived of the light of his Father's countenance, he drank the dregs of his Father's wrath; received into his soul the bitter anguish which would have been our portion through eternity; and struggled, at the same time, with all the malice and all the madness of hell. But being Jehovah in our nature, his sufferings, though short, were of infinite value, and completed the purchase of our redemption. His own arm defeated the hosts of darkness—his expiring breath proclaimed his victory—and the cross of Calvary stood the bloody trophy of his conquest.

The gospel informs us that, though our Redeemer died, he rose again, and ascended up, visibly, into the highest heaven—that he appears there at this moment, as the intercessor of his people, presenting in their room his everlasting merits—that there he manages all their con-

cerns—that thence he sends down his Spirit to work effectually in their hearts, and to prepare them for being with him in glory.

The gospel further informs us, that the salvation which Jesus Christ has procured is freely offered to the chief of sinners; that whosoever will, may come and receive it, and be forever happy; and that if any to whom it is preached, shall perish at last, they will have nothing to blame but their own willful, obstinate unbelief.

[*The application is wanting.*]

ON STEADFASTNESS

IN

RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT.

SERMON XII.

ON STEADFASTNESS IN RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT.

EPHESIANS IV. 14.

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

The unity of Christians in the faith, the growth and strength of their character, have much importance attached to them by the Lord Jesus, and appear, if we may use the expression, to lie very near his heart. After his ascension to the throne of his glory, one of the first acts of his intercession, and of the power of his exalted state, was to make provision for the con-

tinuance and increase of these graces. *When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men: and he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry; for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man; unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.* What the particular connection is between his people's advancement in knowledge and spiritual attainments, and the degree of happiness in their unseen witnesses, or what especial influence it may exert upon the general economy of his kingdom, in the invisible world, we do not know, nor is it useful if it were proper to inquire. But we do know, from the passage just read, that whatever is great or magnificent in the office of an apostle, or prophet, or evangelist; whatever is useful or honorable in a pastor or teacher, it was and is conferred upon them, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of *his body, the church.* We are furnished with ordinances, and means in every variety, that there may be no hindrance to our profiting in the school of Jesus Christ—that we may habitually enlarge our knowledge of those things *which the angels desire to look into;* and as fellow-stu-

dents with them of *the mystery of God*, may grow in the intelligence which they value, and in fitness for their fellowship, when after a few days spent here, in *absence from the Lord*, we shall join their society in his presence and service.

Surely if such is our destination—if these the prospects which cheer us in this vale of tears—if our hearts are set upon their invigorating refreshment and peerless dignity—nothing can worse become us than indifference about our progress in the Christian lesson; nothing should fill us with deeper shame than the poor account which most of us have to give of the pains wasted upon our spiritual education, and of our slowness of heart to understand our Lord's instructions. On nothing should our eagerness be prompted, our ambition fired, and our efforts expended, more than on this, *that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*

It may be of advantage to us to consider somewhat more minutely this description of religious children—the contrast which ought to mark our characters—and the means and motives to our solid improvement.

I. Our notice is drawn to the characters of these religious children. The apostle states it to consist principally in two things—*fickleness* in matters of faith, and *facility* of deception by designing men.

1. *Fickleness* in matters of faith—being *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*

There always has been and always will be a desperate and deadly conflict between truth and error, nor can there be any compromise between them. The bastard charity of the day is very clamorous to make us give up all that we account precious, or at least to compound with and not to molest their contraries. But the demand is absurd and the concession impossible. It is the *nature of truth* to be the most intolerant thing conceivable. That truth is and can be but *one.* And the *Liar* plays off his most ancient, most extensive, and most successful game, when he can sow in the church the seeds of all sorts of discordant principles touching the faith and hope of sinful men. In this, it is true, God does as he does in other cases, bring good out of evil. *There must be heresies among you,* i. e. divisions on account of the truth, *that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.* Thus it fared with the churches in the days and under the eyes of the apostles themselves. The

apostle Paul was constantly in armor combatting for the faith that had been delivered once for all to the saints. Every gross corruption of the gospel, every foolish and fantastic whim invented and broached by men of reprobate minds, or of distorted imagination, infested the churches in as great a variety as at any later period. Perhaps modern times cannot reckon a single deviation from the gospel, which, in form or in substance, was not a curse of the apostolic age. No sooner were the pestiferous notions started, than crowds started and ran after them. If any thing, in the mean while, struck the fancy of one who was or who wished to be a leader, a part of the crowd would turn aside after *him*. Some of them, after fatiguing themselves in the pursuit of every vanity, would perchance return to a sober mind, and readhere to the cause which they had deserted. Others again, though cured of one extravagance, were just as ready to fall into another as the occasion recurred; and many, proceeding from one step to another in their evil course, at last made shipwreck of the faith altogether, and became downright apostates; abandoning the grounds of their confidence before God and the communion of his people, and *perishing at last in their own corruption. These were they who separated themselves; sensual, not having the Spirit. They went* OUT

from us, says John, *but they were not* OF *us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*

It is no otherwise yet. Old errors of every sort, which have been exploded long ago, revive, are new-dressed, and recommended to the acceptance of the religious world. I say *old errors*, for the devil's wit is not inexhaustible; and therefore his delusions, plausible though they be, are only stale artifices newly tricked up to catch the ignorant and the conceited. All that the "rational Christianity" of the day glories in as its own discoveries has many centuries ago been cast out of the Christian church as *heresies of perdition.* But come when they will, and how they will, they are sure of a ready reception, and many abettors among those who are *tossed to and fro, and are carried about with every wind of doctrine.* They, indeed, call themselves "philosophers" and "liberal inquirers;" but the apostle calls them by their true name, "babies," and will allow them no place among inquirers but the place of those *who are ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth.* Learn what they will, the truth is what they do not learn and never can perceive. They have no fixed first principles; nothing to keep them firm and steady in the hour of temptation, or to

prevent them being led away by the error of the wicked. In the calm sunshine, while there is no disturbance of the church's tranquillity, they mingle with the multitude and pass for Christians. But when the storm gathers, the waters swell, the winds blow, they are shaken from their own steadfastness. They never were secured to the rock of safety, but lay loose and idle upon the surface. Now the trial hath reached them, and without strong moorings, without grapplings, without anchors, without any fastenings, they are swept out of the Christian roads, and are the sport of the waves and the winds on the trackless ocean. Soon are they scattered away from the rock; and while they run, swift as the evil blast can drive them, towards certain destruction, they are elated, ignorant as they are, with the rapidity of their course, until they are suddenly dashed among the breakers, or ingulfed in the billows, or absorbed in the quicksands. Thus terminates their adventurous speculation, and the last news of the poor souls is, "they perished!"

I have been referring to those errors, in the success of which the Destroyer goes directly to his proper work, the irretrievable ruin of men. But a capital error seldom comes alone; so there are many smaller deviations from the soundness of the faith which attend the steps and prepare

the way for that which strikes at the foundation of entire Christianity. It is melancholy and almost incredible to see what a mere puff of wind is sufficient to drive many a gallant looking vessel out of her course; and the odds are infinitely against her, but before she recovers it, she falls among enemies who decoy her to her ruin. Without figure, you often find those who, upon the whole, are friendly to the truth; yet by the merest trifle in the world—something which appears to them ingenious when it is only absurd—something which is recommended by a respectable name—something of which the whole attraction is its supposed novelty—turns them aside from "the old paths where is the good way."

The swarms of little sects which spring up and die almost as soon as they are known, yet for the time being vex the friends and furnish matter of exultation to the foes of evangelical doctrine, owe their origin for the most part to a paltry individual vanity. The peace of the church is broken; her strength is divided; the vigor of her sons is impaired by foolish contentions. The wily adversary does not let the occasion slip. Many who set out with an apparent trifle, do not end till they have made inroads upon the substantial truth; and Christians are called to struggle with an enemy who has

already penetrated their camp. On such fickle beings you never can count; they want that sobriety of mind, that Christian common sense, which is proof against such small attacks, and is infinitely better for preserving the order and the truth of God pure and entire, than the finest genius and the profoundest learning can be without it.

2. Liableness to imposition by the arts of the insidious is another character of these religious children.

Error, when seen in its true colors, is rather apt to deter than to allure. Nor is there perhaps a single one which, if exhibited without disguise, would ever succeed in making proselytes. Even children would be too sagacious for such dupery. Accordingly its approaches are conducted with caution and address. It is very careful not to alarm suspicion or excite prejudice. Concealment is its very life. Its abettors will pretend that your faith and theirs, however they may differ upon speculative points, come nearer to each other on all questions of practice than you are ready to admit. They will enumerate a number of things which no man in his senses ever thinks of disputing; and when there is no gainsaying them in these matters, they will leave you, if they are masterworkmen, to draw the inference that, after all,

they cannot be so far wrong as some would persuade you; well knowing that the great obstacle to your conversion is surmounted when you are brought, by this piece of craft, to form a favorable opinion of their tenets. But you have already entered into temptation; you have already set your foot in the path which goes down to death; and if God in his great mercy do not enable you to make a speedy retreat, your ruin is inevitable. Take it then, at the very beginning, as a simple rule, and of easy and sure application, The man who equivocates in religious matters, who declines giving you a prompt explanation of his views, and rather evades your inquiries than meets them, that man is a deceiver and an Antichrist. Truth was not intended to be smuggled. A city set on a hill cannot be hid, nor is a lighted candle to be put under a bushel. *Preach the word* is the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the teacher who does not do it frankly, so that men may not only understand his meaning, but cannot possibly misunderstand it, when treating of our eternal peace, is an enemy to our happiness and to our Lord. Avoid him as you would a pestilence. My contempt and horror embrace all those, who, after years of public ministrations, leave their people in doubt what their sentiments are. Truth is not with them the infi-

nitely important interest. Their prospect is that of a fearful reckoning with that Savior, who *came into the world that he might bear witness to the truth;* and even here it is the duty of his church to spew them out of her mouth.

3. Another artifice of those who lie in wait to deceive is the wrapping up of their deceptions in scriptural phrases, and even in the language which is consecrated by the usage of the Christian church. Every thing sounds fair and looks well; has a pious air and apparently a sound sense; and they may nothwithstanding be inculcating the most damnable errors, and converting the very word of God into a vehicle for the poison. Undoubtedly the inspired word expresses revealed truth in the most precise and proper manner. And the objection to these men is, not that they quote the scriptures, but that they quote them fraudulently. The cheat lies here—the passages quoted have, from time immemorial, borne in the church of God a definite sense. You of course understand them in that received sense. But you are not aware that these apostles of error, take them in quite a different sense, they and you use the same terms, but you do not intend the same thing; and when they think you are not drilled quite enough, they will never have the candor to undeceive you. They will let out in other places and at

other times, as far as they judge it prudent, what their meaning is; and in the mean while you become so accustomed to hear this perversion of holy writ, that your minds are debauched from the simplicity of Christ, and you imperceptibly slide into the pit they have digged for you. Sometimes, indeed, this trick overshoots the mark. It is related of John Taylor, the famous Arian of Norwich, that he gave mortal offense to an Arian congregation in London by the use of scripture language. His hearers, like people of that class everywhere, were not much acquainted with their Bibles, and mistook him for an old-fashioned puritan! Thus the common sense of mankind, even of Arians themselves, when they are not put on their guard, decided that whatever the Bible teaches, it does not teach Arianism.

4. A fourth stratagem of deceivers is an affectation of unbounded liberality and charity.

Nothing is so odious in their eyes as bigotry. Why must you claim the exclusive privilege of being in the right? Why is not another man's opinion as good as your own? Why not allow your neighbors the privilege of which you are so tenacious, the privilege of thinking for themselves? Why must your charity be confined to sects or principles? Cannot a man be distinguished for Christian virtues, and exemplary

in the discharge of his Christian duties, a sincere lover of the truth and ardent in the pursuit of it, unless all his ideas of propriety be squared by your own rule? How terrible that the religion of peace should set friends quarreling! How unworthy of the good will which the gospel was intended to cherish, and of the generous philanthropy of its Divine Author! All this is very fine no doubt; very plausible talk, but in the mouths of the crafty nothing but talk; yet its effect is to overthrow the faith of some, who, from want of discrimination, from a softness of mind, from not suspecting any mischief with so benevolent a face, from not having nerves to withstand a little raillery, from the joint power of ridicule and flattery, run headlong into the arms of the fiend, and from a dread of bigotry adopt ruinous heresy. On all which I crave leave to submit a remark or two.

(1.) They who are so very anxious about the liberty of thinking for themselves, mean in reality the liberty of thinking *for* you and thinking *through* you. Who hinders them from thinking and speaking too? Who meddles with their thoughts or their speech, until they invade the sanctuary of our own faith? Then if they be resisted—if every thing is not yielded to them as a matter of course—if we exercise the right of thinking and speaking—they are vastly indig-

nant. Then come forth the lamentations about the lack of charity, and all the whinings about "bigotry" and "persecution," of which the true grievance is that they cannot provoke something which might appear worthy of the name. But do you shut your mouths and allow them to have all the representation in their own way—let them without contradiction or opposition spread their doctrines and instil their poison throughout the community—and you will doubtless be lauded for your liberality and charity!

(2.) My second remark is, that after all the truths of the gospel are not matters of human opinion, nor have you any right to treat them so. They are facts about which our appeal must lie to the veracity of God speaking in his word. He has committed them to us as a sacred deposit, which we are ordered to keep pure and entire, contending earnestly for them, and are not at liberty to make a compromise of them with any opinions whatsoever.

(3.) Once more. This profession about "liberality" and "charity" is a mere artifice of imposture. No men have less of it than they whose boast of it is the loudest. How do they exult and triumph in the misconduct of any who hold sounder principles than themselves? Now if the apostle understood the nature of charity when he said that she rejoiceth not in iniquity,

they who do so rejoice proclaim that they are utterly destitute of its influence.

You shall find these advocates for charity, when they are in mixed companies, all gentleness, all forbearance, with nothing but the milk of human kindness; but when they are by themselves, to use the expression of one who had been once of their party—"bitter enough." In short, of all the sects which are abroad in the world, not excepting even the followers of the man of sin, there are none which occasionally evince more virulence and violence of feeling, nor a more persecuting temper, than these same smooth-tongued praisers of charity. Of all the bigots on this earth, let me be farthest from the bigot to modern liberality.

Let us now turn our eyes for a moment,

II. To the contrast which we ought to exhibit to these religious children. *That ye be no more children.* We should then display,

1. *Intelligence.* I know not how it has come to pass; but such is the fact, that hearers of the gospel are prone to take their profession upon trust. They think, or act as if they thought, that any particular acquaintance with its principles and proofs, belongs exclusively to the ministry. They commit the interests of their property, to the lawyer; of their bodies, to the physician; and as for their immortal souls, the cler-

gyman may look after them, if he pleases. In this spirit of listlessness do they hear the gospel, and forget it almost as soon as heard. But for diligent inquiry—for ascertaining with their own eyes and understandings what are revealed truths, on points too of infinite moment—for searching the scriptures daily, whether these things which they are taught from the pulpit, are really so, why it 's what no *genteel* professor ever thinks about. The consequence is, and must be, that they are mere children in the most important of all knowledge—even men of high respectability for talents and research in other things, betray the most surprising ignorance of the Bible. No wonder that they are carried about by every wind of doctrine, and fall helpless victims into the snares of those who lie in wait to deceive. At the same time, if they happen to get any crude and undigested notions of Christian truth, they are as obstinate and positive in maintaining their own hasty views, as if they had studied the scriptures all their lives long. My friends, this will not do. Have you not immortal souls? Do you know when they will be required of you? Are you fully aware of their natural condition? and what is requisite to their eternal happiness? On all these questions, the Bible treats plainly and decisively. It fairly warns you that a mistake is very possible, very

common, and infinitely dangerous. Is it a waste of time, think you, to know what it really does determine? Is the message of the great and terrible God, to men, to *you*, to you *personally* to be thrown aside, with less ceremony than a daily newspaper, and without an effort so much as to understand what he says? And all your awful concern in it, to be tossed away with a carelessness which makes the angels tremble? Do you consider, while you indulge this supineness, while you neglect to become proficients in the knowledge of that wisdom which cometh from above, you are habitual breakers of God's commandments, in as high and in a higher degree, than if you were common drunkards, thieves, adulterers, and prostitutes? Rouse from your slumbers, or you may see stranger things than publicans and harlots going into the kingdom of God before your faces, and leaving you with all your decencies, your morals, your accomplishments, your respectability, to beg for admission and be refused. Strive to enter in at the straight gate. Aim at being not only Christians, but intelligent Christians. Study that great charter of your salvation, the Bible, until, by God's enriching blessing, you shall *always be ready to give a reason of the hope that is within you*, and no longer be ranked as children, nor be

considered as an easy prey to them who lie in wait to deceive.

2. The second attribute of Christian character as opposed to the infirmities of children, is *firmness.*

In religious, as in other life, the plausible, are the least solid, and the least to be trusted. They who have arrived at what the scriptures call *perfection*, who have grown up into Christian manhood, are not to be moved away from the hope of the gospel by smooth stories and bland professions; nor to be cajoled out of their faith concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, by pretenders to new illumination, or more expansive charity. *Beloved*, says John, *believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* And they are to try *them by their doctrines*, especially, adds the apostle, try their doctrines concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God.* Do you think the insipid, the frigid notion that Jesus Christ was *born*, like any other man, gives you the meaning, or touches the emphasis, of his *coming in the flesh?* A Christian, that is a settled, established Christian, is not thus to be fooled and

wheedled out of the true doctrine of his Redeemer, and of eternal life along with it. Ten sheep-skins, ever so artfully put on, cannot conceal the insidious wolf. His voice betrays him, and the real sheep flee from him. It is no new thing for Satan to be transformed into an angel of light; nor his ministers as ministers of righteousness. A well trained Christian will use the freedom to look under this angel mask—to inquire how far the resemblance to ministers of righteousness goes—and by faithfully and fearlessly applying the apostle's rule, will speedily detect both the devil and his ministers. He has told us how these gentry, the ministers of Satan, must be treated. *If there come any unto you*, viz. with the pretensions of a teacher, and *bring not this doctrine*, the doctrine of Christ as come in the flesh, *receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed, for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds.* He carries his master's mark in his forehead. Christians, who are enlisted under the Captain of salvation, are to allow no place to such an Antichrist—far less do any thing to encourage him. There must be no half measures—no parleying—no pausing. Shut your doors upon him, saith the inspired direction, and let him go where the devil and his doctrines are in better repute. If not, if you are frighted by the terror of an ill

name, if you are unable to stand the small shot of Antichrist, and begin to tremble and tamper when the breath of the evil one approaches you —look well to yourself; you are in a fair way of changing your professed service, of being disowned by Jesus Christ, and linking yourself forever with the devil and his angels. Let it be known, Christians, openly known, so that there can be no mistake, that you have neither hearts, nor hands, nor ears, for any, who, upon whatever pretext, would unsettle your faith on the Son of God. So that men may save you the pain, and themselves the judgment, of trying to break up your trust for eternity, and of persuading you to lay another foundation *than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

III. The means of our preservation and solid improvement are very obvious and simple.

1. Be students of the holy scriptures; search them; dig in them as for hidden treasures, and you shall find that which will make you wise to salvation, while the scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not. But remember that he who gave them for a light to your feet and a lamp to your paths, must open your eyes before you shall see wonderful things in his law. Sweet and blessed and freely given are his gracious teachings. *Did not our hearts burn within us,* said one disci-

ple to the other, *while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*

2. Repress vain curiosity. Inquire not into the reason of those things which are to be received on the credit of the divine testimony. Be satisfied that the Lord hath said it, and ask no farther. They, *who boldly intrude into those things which they have not seen*, may pretend what they please; but you have the highest authority in earth or heaven for being assured, that *they are only vainly puffed up by their fleshly mind*, and with all their knowledge or speculations, can do you nothing but harm.

3. Open not your ears to the suggestion of new light and new discoveries in religion. "The true Christ is no new Christ." He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever. There is no room for discoveries in God's revelation for the salvation of men. The revelation is itself the discovery. You are not to look for a new way to heaven. Jesus Christ is the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by him. This has been the divine method from the very beginning. That which a thousand years ago brought his sons and daughters to glory, viz. the making the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings, must bring you thither, or your arrival there is hopeless. And as to the new light, which is the

boast of those who turn aside from the holy commandment delivered unto them, rely upon it, it is nothing but a new edition of old darkness, only resembling more than it did the dunnest smoke of hell.

4. Keep especially clear of uncommon pretenders to charity. Satan will mask his designs so long as he can, and so will all his ministers. Believe that God is love, that he is the great and essential Charity. Be satisfied then with as much charity as he has shown, and do not think of improving upon your Maker by entertaining and expressing a more charitable opinion of sinners than himself. He hath said and will make it good, and see that your charity do not trench upon his truth, he hath said, gainsay it who will, *He that believeth not shall be damned.*

IV. Lastly, we have abundant motives for our Christian cultivation.

The angels are our fellow-students, and in some particulars of their education Christians have the preference. Their first knowledge of God's gracious design of forming Jews and Gentiles into one family with themselves, under Christ the head, they got from the church, and probably from the revelations made to Paul. *To the intent*, says that great proficient in sacred things, *that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be made known* BY THE

CHURCH *the manifold wisdom of God.* If the thought of being scholars in the same school, and learners of the same things, with those blessed beings, does not raise in your minds the glory of your studies, and cause you to strain every nerve in patient and persevering application, that you may be fit to hold converse with them when you shall throw off this body, it is not for the speech of earth to tell the baseness of your spirits; eternity must find the proper expressions.

Moreover, every advance in true scriptural knowledge advances you at the same time in righteousness and true holiness, deepens and brightens the features of the divine image, and is a step in your heavenly promotion; for *they that be wise shall shine as the sun* in the kingdom of their Father.

Farther, every victory over error renders every succeeding one more easy. *Resist the devil and he will flee from you.* And when the chief has taken himself to flight, his subalterns will not be long in quitting the field. It is the *first* attack in which they are most furious and lay the basis of their future success. Foiled here, they become less troublesome. Satan and his servants have something else to do with their time and talents than to waste them upon fruitless attempts.

Once more. Not only will your duty become easier in proportion as you faithfully perform it, but every advantage gained over the foe draws you into closer communion with our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in his strength that you withstand and conquer. His glory gains by every achievement performed in his name. You press hard upon his steps as a victorious Savior, and are safe as you are near him. He notes and he rewards your efforts. *To him that overcometh*, is his magnificent promise, *will I grant to sit down with mè on my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father on his throne.*

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. Amen!

END OF VOLUME II.

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